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**THE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSED AUTHORI-
ZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE
AGAINST ISIL AND U.S. POLICY,
STRATEGY, AND POSTURE IN
THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST**

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Tuesday, March 3, 2015.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:02 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. William M. "Mac" Thornberry (chairman of the committee) presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM M. "MAC" THORN-
BERRY, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, CHAIRMAN, COM-
MITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

The CHAIRMAN. Hearing will come to order.

Good morning. Today, the House Armed Services Committee meets to hear testimony on the U.S. Central Command's strategic threats and challenges.

By way of information for our members and guests, we will go as far as we can go until 10:30, then we will recess to attend the joint meeting on the House floor, and then we will resume just as soon as that joint meeting is over.

We explored with our witnesses maybe trying to rearrange this hearing; that wasn't possible. And so with you all's patience, we will come back just as soon as the joint meeting is completed in order to continue the hearing.

Over the past year, the developments in U.S. Central Command's [CENTCOM] area of responsibility have been troubling. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS], questions about future security situation in Afghanistan, the Government of Yemen's fall to Iranian-backed rebels, and the prospect of a deal ratifying Iran as a threshold nuclear power, all have created serious stress on our strategic position and on our alliances. Any notion that the U.S. could pivot away from the Middle East toward other regions has proven to be naive at best.

Part of the challenge here is the absence of a comprehensive strategy across the Middle East. The limited approach that the President has taken has left instability and weak or failed states from Libya to Yemen. Many of those locations have become breeding grounds for terrorists, which is the opposite, of course, of what the administration has tried to achieve. As various actors in the Middle East and elsewhere follow our defense budget debates, one of the results of that has been more doubts about the reliability as an ally.

What I hope to hear today is a comprehensive strategy or at least the foundations of a strategy which will help provide a roadmap towards a more stable Middle East led by responsible actors. These states have just as much at stake in defeating Islamic terrorism as we do.

This committee also needs to continue to explore operational concerns we have about various AUMF [authorization for use of military force] proposals that contain restrictions on how we engage the enemy. I believe it is critical that we do not validate Iran's standing in the region by allowing them to have threshold nuclear capability. That has and will breed instability and increase security competition in both the Middle East and the wider geopolitical order. We cannot allow that to happen.

Mr. Smith.

STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I agree with the chairman, you, General Austin, you have the toughest assignment in the military. The problems keep cropping up in many places. For, you know, over a decade we had the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Those two areas are still problematic, but many others have been added since then. And I think the chairman did a pretty good exhaustive list looking at Syria and Yemen and other places.

And getting back to stability in that region is an enormous challenge. I will say that I think it sort of defies a comprehensive strategy where you come up with the strategy and then you just, you know, automatically plug it in no matter what happens. The problems evolve. They move in different directions, and they are contradictory.

Certainly, we are opposed to Assad's leadership in Syria. That, you know, bad leadership has led to all kinds of problems, but, you know, the alternative does not look much more attractive. So what is your solution? What do you do? There are no easy answers there, number one; number two, I think it would be a mistake for us to assume that it is either the U.S.'s responsibility or that we have the ability ourselves to solve these problems.

This is primarily a regional issue. This is primarily a problem of governance, leadership, religion, all manner of different issues colliding in that region. What we have to do is see how we can be part of helping to move those countries in a correct direction to get to greater stability. This is not something that the U.S. can come up with a plan and then go in there and implement it and fix Syria or fix Yemen or fix Iraq.

I think if we took that approach, that would be a mistake and would lead to greater pushback than it would to solutions. And obviously, one of the biggest problems in the region, aside from the Islamic extremists, like ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] and Al Qaeda, is the Sunni-Shia split, you know, most exemplified by the split between Saudi Arabia and Iran. That complicates everything. In the offensive that we have just heard about launched against Tikrit is launched against ISIL. Obviously that is, you

know, one of our foremost enemies that we want to see defeated. One of the countries leading that offensive is Iran, another country that we are troubled by. How do you sort of deal with all of those different complex situations?

And I think what I want to hear today personally is not that you have the answer. I am not going to put that burden on you, to say here is the strategy that is going to solve the problem. I want to hear how the U.S. can best use its resources to make the problem better instead of worse, understanding that it defies any sort of simple solution or defies any sort of U.S. solution.

And let me just say on Iran, on the idea that somehow if we do a deal with them we make them a threshold nuclear power, they have already done that. They made that decision and they moved forward. There is no deal—I think the deal that everybody wants is where we go in and we tell Iran you give everything up and we get to keep the sanctions on you. Well, I don't think Iran is going to go for that, so we have got to figure out what is the best approach. And the approach the administration is trying to take is trying to contain them to make sure that they cannot break out and get to a nuclear weapon.

If we don't reach a deal, the risk of that happening goes up exponentially because then Iran has nothing to lose. The sanctions are there. How do we monitor it? How do we pursue it? If we can get an agreement that severely limits their nuclear program so that we can be confident that they won't be able to get a nuclear weapon for at least a year or more without us first knowing that they are trying to do it, I think that is a significant improvement. If we walk away, the status quo is not to our advantage. There is no reason to believe that they won't expand their nuclear situation that could lead to even greater conflict in the region.

Again, I would prefer the answer that says Iran just walks away from the nuclear program, no questions asked. I just don't see that on the table. And I think that is but one example of the complex set of choices that we face here that defy easy answers, that defy a U.S. policy that is just going to solve the problem.

So in a complicated world, like I said, I look forward to hearing what we can do to hopefully contain the problem and move things in the right direction, understanding the limitations of our ability to simply solve them.

With that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. I am pleased to welcome back Ms. Christine Wormuth, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and General Lloyd Austin, Commander of the U.S. Central Command as our guest witnesses today.

Without objection, both of your full written statements will be made part of the record, and we would invite you at this point to summarize your statements before we go to questions.

Ms. Wormuth.

STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTINE E. WORMUTH, UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Secretary WORMUTH. Thank you, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the committee, for inviting me

here today to talk about DOD [Department of Defense] strategy and posture in the Greater Middle East. It is a pleasure to be back here again this week to talk to you about a different and even more challenging part of the world.

It is also a great pleasure to be here with General Austin. We are very lucky to have him serving as our commander in CENTCOM. He is also, frankly, a terrific reminder of the overall quality of all of our men and women serving in the region today.

As you all know, our forces in CENTCOM are confronting many difficult global security challenges. New realities have forced us to take a hard look at our near- and long-term goals for our engagement in the Middle East. Although the Department will face many different challenges in the Middle East, as Ranking Member Smith noted, two issues are particularly critical and are at the top of our agenda: The first is how to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, and the second is preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

In Iraq and Syria, the Department is working with partners for a truly whole-of-government effort to try and degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. We have over 2,600 U.S. service men and women currently in Iraq working with the Government of Iraq, and more than 60 countries participating in our global coalition against ISIL. We are making progress. This is going to be a long-term campaign and we need to be patient, but we are making progress.

We have blunted ISIL's momentum. We have degraded its ability to mass and maneuver forces. We have pressured or eliminated its leadership cells, and we have disrupted its command and control and supply lines. In short, we have put ISIL on the defensive. And I think you are seeing that, and I am sure General Austin will speak to that in more detail in various parts of Iraq right now.

But countering ISIL would not be possible without local partners in the lead. U.S. and coalition partners are supporting the Government of Iraq by assisting with training, equipping, and advising its armed forces. Last summer, we stood up our advise and assist teams to partner with local forces in the ISF [Iraqi security forces] and the Peshmerga, and early this year we began training these forces at four different sites across Iraq. I traveled to Iraq in January and was able to visit one of the sites myself, Taiji, where I was able to see firsthand the partnership that we have with Iraqi forces.

In addition to our efforts in Iraq to go after ISIL, we are also working with our coalition partners in Syria, and we are also working to build the capabilities of the moderate Syrian opposition there. We expect the training of our first DOD class of vetted opposition elements to begin—we expect to begin training them later this month. Our forces in the region are strengthening our partners' ability to fight terrorism locally, but ultimately, it is going to be Iraqi forces and Syrian fighters who will secure the gains against ISIL and inflict a lasting defeat.

To support what we are doing, the President has developed and transmitted to Congress an authorization for the use of military force that demonstrates a whole-of-government support for him to successfully prosecute the armed conflict against ISIL within reasonable limitations. Enacting a bipartisan ISIL-specific AUMF would provide a clear and powerful signal to the American people,

to our allies, and to our enemies, and very importantly, I think, to our U.S. service men and women that the United States stands united to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. And I look forward to talking with you more this morning about the AUMF proposal.

Defeating ISIL is a major focus and challenge but so is Iran in the region. As the President has made clear, his top priority is preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Iran's nuclear ambitions continue to be a consistent area of concern for us in the Department of Defense. We are hopeful that the P5+1 negotiations will result in a comprehensive and verifiable deal that will ensure the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. But at DOD, our job is to remain vigilant as well, and we do that by helping to underwrite negotiations with our robust posture and capabilities in the region, and we maintain a laser-like focus on that.

As the President has said publicly, we will do whatever is necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, including the use of military force, if necessary, and we are postured to do that in the region today. Beyond Iran's nuclear program, we have other concerns about Iran's activities in the region. They are engaged in a variety of destabilizing activities across the region but also well beyond that. And even if we are successful in neutralizing Iran's nuclear threat through hard-nosed diplomacy, we will continue to support U.S. Government efforts to counter Iran and the full range of threats that it poses to our friends and allies in the region and beyond.

Even as we work to degrade and defeat ISIL and to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, we are also at the same time committed to moving to a smaller force in Afghanistan and consolidating the gains that we have made there over the past decade of international support to the Afghanistan Government. The U.S. mission in Afghanistan has helped support the Afghan people and has protected U.S. national interests by working with local partners to build up the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces.

It is clear that we still have a lot of work to do in the next 2 years, but I think we have made some very positive strides, and I am particularly encouraged by the fact that President Ghani sees the U.S. and NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] role and presence as a very important part of his strategy to bring stability and security to Afghanistan.

We are also going to continue to work with Pakistan and the Central Asian States to address existing and emerging threats in the region. Like Afghanistan, Pakistan is also facing a potent threat from extremists, and I think something we all saw tragically with the attack on the school in Peshawar. We are committed to continuing to improve our relationship with Pakistan by collaborating where our strategic interests come together and engaging diplomatically where they don't.

Meeting the range of challenges that we see in the CENTCOM AOR [area of responsibility] is going to take a lot of resources and effort, and it is important that we use those resources as effectively as possible, as Ranking Member Smith noted. The President's budget request for 2016 supports our strategy for the region and enables the services to continue to address our most critical needs,

even as we get smaller and more capable over the next several years.

If sequestration returns, however, in 2016 and beyond, the Department's readiness would deteriorate markedly, which would harm our ability to respond promptly and efficiently when called upon. As a consequence, we would have fewer forces available to support operations and respond to crises in a region as vital as the Middle East.

This is a very dynamic time for our policy in the region. It is a challenging time. The Secretary has signaled his commitment to working with our government and international partners to shape a more secure region in the coming years. We are clear-eyed about the fiscal constraints we are facing, but we believe it is necessary even in the face of those constraints to maintain our commitment to protect our interests in the region and to combat the threats that we face there.

Thank you.

And I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Wormuth can be found in the Appendix on page 43.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General.

**STATEMENT OF GEN LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA, COMMANDER,
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General AUSTIN. Good morning. Chairman Thornberry, Congressman Smith, distinguished members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to talk about the broad efforts and the current posture of the United States Central Command.

Upfront and most importantly, I would like to thank all of you for your continued and strong support of our men and women in uniform and their families. I look forward to talking about them and about the exceptional contributions that they continue to make on behalf of the command and our Nation.

I am pleased to appear here this morning alongside Ms. Wormuth. Christine is widely respected by professionals throughout the Defense Department, both civilian and military, and we are most grateful for her support of our efforts at CENTCOM. I will join her in making a few brief opening comments and then we are prepared to answer your questions.

Ladies and gentlemen, much has happened in the CENTCOM area of responsibility since I last appeared before this committee a year ago. Indeed, the Central Region is today more volatile and chaotic than I have seen it at any other point, and the stakes have never been higher. The forces of evil that threaten our homeland and our interest in that strategically important part of the world thrive in unstable environments marked by poor governance, economic uncertainty, ungoverned or under-governed spaces. And therefore, it is essential that we be present and engaged and that we cultivate strong partnerships and continue to do our part to address emerging threats and to move the region in a direction of greater stability and security. And we must be properly resourced

to do what is required to effectively protect and promote our interests.

At CENTCOM, in addition to doing all that we can to prevent problems from occurring, while shaping future outcomes, we spend a great deal of our time and energy managing real-world crisis. Over the past year, we dealt with conflicts in Iraq and Syria, we transitioned combat operations to a train, advise, and assist CT [counterterrorism]-focused mission in Afghanistan. At the same time, we dealt with a number of difficult challenges in Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, and in a host of other locations throughout our area of responsibility. We actively pursued violent extremist groups, and we took measures to counter the radical ideologies that are espoused by these groups.

We also dealt with Iran, which continues to act as a belligerent force in the region, primarily through its Quds forces and through support to proxy actors, such as Lebanese Hezbollah. And while we are hopeful that an acceptable agreement will be reached with Iran with respect to its nuclear program, either way, whether we reach an agreement or we don't reach an agreement, Iran will continue to present a challenge for us going forward.

We are faced with a number of challenges in our region; however, I firmly believe that challenges also present opportunities, and we make progress primarily by pursuing these opportunities, and we do pursue them. And I am confident that our broad efforts are having a measurable impact. Of course, the most immediate threat facing us now is a threat posed by ISIL or Daesh [Arabic acronym for ISIL]. This barbaric organization must be defeated, and it will be defeated.

We are currently in the process of executing our regional military campaign plan, and I am pleased to report that we are making significant progress. At the outset, we said that we would need to halt ISIL's advance, and we have done that in Iraq. We said that we are going to have to regenerate and restructure Iraq's security forces to help them re-establish the border, and we are in the process of doing that right now.

We said that we would have to help our partners in the region to bolster their defenses against ISIL, and we continue to help our friends in Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey. We said that we would have to build credible ground forces to counter ISIL in Syria and to guard against ungoverned spaces, and we will soon begin doing that as a part of our Syria train and equip program.

So ladies and gentlemen, we are making progress. In fact, we are about where we said that we would be in the execution of our military campaign plan, which supports the broader whole-of-government strategy that is designed to counter ISIL. And we are having significant effects on the enemy.

Since commencing our air operations in early August, just 7 months ago, we have killed more than 8,500 ISIL fighters, we have destroyed hundreds of their vehicles along with tanks and heavy weapons systems. We have significantly degraded his capability, his ability to command and control his forces, and also his primary sources of revenue, namely, his oil refineries and his crude collection points.

The fact is that he can no longer do what he did at the outset, which is to seize and to hold new territory. He has assumed a defensive crouch in Iraq. And although he has greater freedom of movement in Syria, he is largely in a defensive there as well. He has begun to expand into other areas, namely North Africa, and in part because he knows that he is losing in Iraq and Syria and he needs to find other ways to maintain his legitimacy.

In going forward, we should expect to see this enemy continue to conduct limited attacks and to orchestrate horrific scenes in order to create IO [information operations] opportunities and to distract and to intimidate. But make no mistake, ISIL is losing this fight, and I am certain that he will be defeated. Again, he will be defeated.

Having said that, there is still work to be done to get to that point, and we intend to continue to execute the campaign as designed, and I say that because how we go about this is very important. If we don't first get things under control in Iraq, where there is a government that we can work with and with some reliable security forces that are available, if we don't get things right there first before expanding our efforts in Syria, then we risk making matters worse in both countries.

But done the right way, in light of the limitations that exist, I believe that we can and we will be successful in our efforts to defeat ISIL. And at the same time, we can be assured continued progress in pursuit of our principal goal, which is to move this strategically important region in the direction of increased stability and security.

Going forward, we will all be required to make tough choices, and we will need to find ways to do more or at least as much with less than the current fiscal environment. That said, I remain concerned by the fact that capability reductions can and will impact our ability to respond to crisis, and especially in the highly volatile Central Region. The resulting loss of flexibility makes the U.S. and our interests increasingly vulnerable to external pressures.

And so I would ask Congress to do its part to make sure that we avoid sequestration and other resourcing limitations that serve to degrade the readiness of America's military forces.

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, members of the committee, I want to thank you once more for the strong support that you continue to show to our service members, our civilians, and their families. They are the very best in the world at what they do. They continue to demonstrate absolute selflessness and they make enormous sacrifices in support of the mission and in support of one another. I am incredibly proud of them and I know that you are as well.

So thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Austin can be found in the Appendix on page 49.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, General. We share your sentiment for those who serve our Nation, including yourself.

I don't think we have time to begin the questioning, so the committee is going to stand in recess until just after the joint meeting where we will resume.

In the meantime, you all please enjoy our hospitality as best you can.

[Recess.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

Again, Ms. Wormuth, and, General, thank you for your patience. And we understand the inconvenience of this coming and going, but we appreciate you all being here. Members will continue to come in as they come back from the joint meeting.

I don't know, General, did you have a chance to listen to the Prime Minister's speech?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I did.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. You know, I was struck, your comments in your opening statement, about Iran's other activities other than its nuclear programs. And that was certainly a point that was highlighted by the Prime Minister.

You spend a lot of time dealing with military leaders throughout your region in the Middle East and North Africa. My question to you is: If there is an agreement that says that Iran shall not be closer to—that has the effect of having Iran not closer than 1 year of having a nuclear weapon, what, in your estimation, would be the reaction of other countries in the region? And I am thinking particularly about the Saudis, the Turks, the Egyptians, people who are interested in this negotiation other than Israel. What would be their reaction to that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, no matter what the outcome is, I think there will be—always be some degree of speculation. I think the first thing that they will want to know is what the details of the agreement are before they make an assessment on how it affects their interests going forward and their security.

To your point that you made earlier, sir, I think the people—the leaders in the region certainly believe that Iran's quest for a nuclear weapon is a threat to the region. But they are also equally concerned about Iran's ability to mine the Straits, Iran's cyber capabilities, Iran's ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] capability or ballistic missile capability, as well as the activity of their Quds forces, which is unhelpful. And so whether we get a deal or don't get a deal, I think they will still share those concerns.

As we negotiate a deal—and I certainly hope that we are able to negotiate one, I think one of the things that we will have to do early on is to go and reassure our allies that we are going to be with them going forward. And we have—we have interest in the region that we will have to protect and we will certainly—certainly move to do that early on.

The CHAIRMAN. Yeah. When I have traveled in the region and also visited with some of their ambassadors here in Washington, one of the concerns I have heard expressed is that having Iran be a threshold nuclear state, basically being able to have it within a year or less, will embolden them with these other kind of activities that you talked about because, then, they will have less concern that the regime is threatened and, therefore, they will be more aggressive in pushing their proxies and potentially naval matters in the Persian Gulf and so forth. Is that some of the concerns that you have heard that you think allies will need to be reassured about?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. I think there are arguments on both side of the fence in terms of, you know, what people speculate that Iran's reaction will be and what we will need to do to counter those reactions or hedge against unhelpful activity.

The CHAIRMAN. Yeah. Well, I am concerned not only about Israel's reaction, which we just heard, but there are a number of other countries that are vitally interested in this. And so it seems to me that that also has to be taken into account. There are lots of topics we can and should talk about, including ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], Yemen, and Afghanistan.

But at this point, I am going to yield to Mr. Smith and other members for questions they may have.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Following up on the Iran issue, I mean, I certainly would prefer a situation where Iran gives up all of its nuclear capacity and, you know, we can take that off the table. And I don't think there is any disagreement with that. The question is, you know, how would we get there? And the answer is, at the moment, we wouldn't. Iran would not agree to that. And I suppose, as the Prime Minister suggested, we could simply hold out and hope for a better deal.

But one question I have is, as this—if we were to do that, if we were to walk away, our sanctions regime is dependent upon other countries agreeing to it. What is your view on what Russia and China and Europe would do in terms of maintaining their sanctions on Iran if we walked away from a deal? And how would that effect Iran's economy and the entire negotiation?

Secretary WORMUTH. Ranking Member Smith, I think obviously the sanctions regime that we have been able to put in place with support from the international community has been key to bringing the Iranians to the table for the negotiations. And I think it would be an open question, particularly with some of the countries, as to whether the support for those sanctions over time for those very, very stiff sanctions, whether they could be sustained in the absence of an ongoing negotiation as we have right now.

So again, I think, our judgment to date has been that as difficult as the situation is—and as you said, Iran has a vote in this. I mean, they have to be willing to make a deal—our sense has been that the talks that we are engaged in right now are the best chance for a potentially lasting solution, and we want to give them a chance. But if they end and there is not a deal, you know, I think we will have to revisit the way forward. But reassurance of the ally—or the partners in the region is going to be a very key part of that because they are obviously very nervous.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. General Austin, do you have a comment or—
General AUSTIN. I don't, sir. I certainly agree—

Mr. SMITH. Okay.

General AUSTIN [continuing]. With what Ms. Wormuth has said, and I wouldn't have anything to add to that, sir.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. And then the other piece of it is—I mean, there is a number of arguments. One of the arguments is that Iran frequently violates deals and doesn't do what they said they were going to. And if that is the case, there is really nothing we could do. You know, they are basically going to move forward and do whatever they are going to do and, you know, we are limited.

The more interesting question to me is: As has been pointed out, Iran has been a year or—depending on who you listen to, anywhere from 3 months to a year away from a nuclear weapon for, gosh, 10 years now at least. Why, in your estimation, have they not just gone ahead and built one?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman Smith, I can't speculate as to the reasons why they haven't—

Mr. SMITH. Well, anyone can speculate.

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, I guess what I would say is that is what it would be. It would be speculation, you know.

Mr. SMITH. Right.

Secretary WORMUTH. Our sense is, is that Iran's leadership has not made the decision to go all the way and acquire a nuclear weapon. Why that is, you know, is known to the Supreme Leader, but I am not sure it is known to anyone in our government.

Mr. SMITH. Right. No. I mean, it is, I think, a cost-benefit analysis there. And, you know, arguably the dumbest policy Iran has pursued in the last, you know, 15 years is the pursuit of a nuclear weapon because they are doing all manner of other bad stuff, but this is the one that has united the international community against them and brought sanctions against them.

So, you know, I just think that it is worth it to continue to try to negotiate because if we could take the nuclear weapon off the table for some extended period of time in Iran, there is a big benefit to that. Just like, you know, for all of the missteps that happened in Syria, the fact that we were able to get rid of Syria's chemical weapons is certainly a positive given now that ISIL is, you know, running around a good chunk of Syria relatively free.

So I think we need to keep trying to figure out a way to get Iran to agree not to build that weapon. And I also think that it is clear from their past actions that it is—it is a 50/50 question for them. It is not something that they have 100 percent decided to do. Because if they had 100 percent decided to do it, it would be done at this point by even Prime Minister Netanyahu's own admission saying they have been, you know, 6 months away from a bomb for 15 years. So I hope we will keep trying to figure that out.

Final question. And I know this is impossible to answer but a huge part of the problem in the region—and, believe me, there are many. But one big part of the problem in the region is the Shia-Sunni split. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have the ironic situation of Iran fighting ISIL and all of the different, you know, disruptive activities that are going on in Lebanon and Syria and elsewhere.

And while we are trying to specifically contain the extremist threat that is ISIL, you know, part of what funded them early on was the notion of some of our allies in the region that, well, you know Assad is friends with Iran, so whatever we can do to go after him is fine and that added fuel to the fire.

Is there any hope of any sort of, you know, both sides, Shia and Sunni, coming to at least—I don't want to say a peace agreement—but figuring out how to better coexist in that region in a less extremist way?

General AUSTIN. Sir, you are right. That is a difficult question to answer, and it involves some speculation going forward. But I

would hope that we would approach this, at least, on a country-by-country basis at the outset. And certainly what we are trying to do in Iraq is, is ensure that the country stays together, it remains focused on the right things, that the government is accommodating to the Sunni population and the Kurdish population that is in the country which is, in my mind, you know, underlines or is a foundation for a lot of the problems that we have seen recently occur. So I think, you know, starting with that, I think it would be a good start.

Also, no matter how we got here in terms of how the activity was supported in the past, the encouraging thing is that what we see currently is a lot of countries in the region and across the globe coming together to try to work with us to stem the flow of foreign fighters, to also minimize opportunities for this enemy to resource itself, to finance itself. And I think those types of things will make a difference going forward.

And I will yield to Ms. Wormuth.

Secretary WORMUTH. I was basically going to make the same point. I mean, I don't think that there is a single cut-and-paste solution that you can take. But I think one of the lessons that we saw coming out perhaps of the previous experience of Iraq was that Maliki's very sectarian approach to governing was a big part of how we got here; and that, I think, [Prime Minister] Abadi has a much greater understanding of the need for a more inclusive approach. And we continue to strongly underscore just how important it is that that be central to his approach to trying to solve this problem with ISIL.

I think it is also—I wouldn't want to overstate it—but I do think that the—the just pure barbarity of what ISIL has prosecuted in terms of the beheadings, the immolation of the Jordanian pilot, that has seemed to cause, I think, many countries and many of the publics in the region to look at this in a different way and to really, I think, question the extremism that they are seeing. So my hope is that perhaps that will do more to help bring the larger society together to try to find solutions.

Mr. SMITH. Yeah. And I am sorry, final question on Iran. I guess the big question is: If the negotiations fall apart, where does that leave us? Because if negotiations fall apart—and we are not even trying to get them to stop—at that point, you know, it is a wide open question. Is Iran going to pursue that nuclear weapon or not?

What do we do then? What do you think Israel does then? Do they wait and hope that, you know, the last decade continues and Iran doesn't step across that line? How does that affect the region?

Secretary WORMUTH. I think what I would say, Congressman, is, you know, if there isn't a deal, certainly from the DOD perspective, we will continue to have the responsibility to—to essentially be the insurance policy, if you will, for the region in terms of making sure that we have the capabilities in our country to help defend Israel, to help defend our interests in the region. And we are committed to making sure that we have those capabilities in a very robust fashion. I think we will work closely with our partners in the region to reassure them of that continued commitment. And then I think, you know, how Israel approaches the problem will be, again, largely up to them.

But we—our responsibility in DOD is to make sure that we have the capabilities to respond if we think that there is a reason to do so and to make sure that we have the ability to provide a military option if needed.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And to the two panelists, thank you for being here and for your service to our Nation.

I am always interested—I have been on this committee for 20 years, so I go back to the Iraq war and 9/11 and all the tragedies of 9/11.

And I heard you, Madam Secretary, and also, General Austin. You mentioned, Madam Secretary, sequestration. General Austin keeps talking about resources.

We have had the service chiefs in here recently to talk about their budgets, and I know the world is very unsettled. I know that we have a certain responsibility, first, to the American people and then to our friends in other regions of the world. I don't dispute that at all.

But I just wonder, when you—you know, you are talking about the training these security forces in Afghanistan that it is—you know, still it is going well or it is going okay—maybe is a better word than “well.” It is a long process.

I just wondered—I am not a great student of history, but I did study history. I just wonder how much longer can we as a nation—and you are a national figure because you are in the administration. General, you are an outstanding military man yourself.

How much longer can we keep going down this road and expect our military to continue to do this and that when their budgets are being cut behind them? And I have been a strong proponent, if we are going to get serious about the world situation, we need to have a war tax. We cannot keep playing this budget game that we keep playing here in Washington and have you come testify. And then we have to battle this thing on the floor of the House, the chairman and ranking member do, of trying to salvage whatever money we can salvage.

So my point is: Are we getting to a point that—as I think General Austin said, aren't we at a point that we need to say the administration military leaders, you know, you and Saudi, you have got a lot of troops, put your troops on the ground. We have got 100 to 200,000 Iraqis in the military. I know what we are trying to do. Some approximations I have heard is 20 to 30,000 fighters. General Austin, you say we have already killed 8,000. So let's take the high figure of 30,000 jihadists and reduce that to 20. I don't understand the numbers of this thing, the financial numbers, nor do I understand the numbers of kill.

And how in the world are we going to continue to expand and send our troops around the world and try to take care of everybody else's problems if they won't step up and take care of it themselves and say to America, “You back us up, but we are going to be the frontline troops”? I don't know—I am not criticizing the administration. I just don't know how much longer this game can keep going on.

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman, if I could try to respond to a couple of those points. I think fundamentally we have tried in a number of different areas, particularly I would say Afghanistan, but also in terms of the counter-ISIL campaign to work very much by, with, and through partner countries. So in Afghanistan, you know, we are very much trying to enable the ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces] to be able to take care of their own security.

You know, fundamentally we got in there, as you well know, after 9/11 to ensure that Afghanistan would not be a safe haven for Al Qaeda. But in the next 2 years, I think we feel pretty good about what we are going to be able to do with the ANSF so that they will be able to take over by the end of 2016 and take care of their security themselves. We will stay there in a relatively small security cooperation footprint in Kabul, but it will largely be their responsibility at that point.

And in Iraq and Syria, you know, we are working very closely with a huge coalition, and about more than a dozen of those members are contributing to the military coalition. So I think we are very much trying to take an approach that isn't about America doing everything for everyone but trying to work with others to help them do more for themselves. And I am sure General Austin will want to add to that.

General AUSTIN. And in terms of the effects that we are having on the enemy, sir, and in terms of the numbers, I think that the numbers are input to the overall calculus in terms of the effects created. But I think it is more important to focus on the effects.

And as we look at ISIL's behavior today, you know, you go back several months ago, ISIL was moving around in large convoy formations, flying a lot of black flags, taking up large swaths of territory. They can no longer do that, and it is principally because of the effects that we have had on—they have the ability to recruit more fighters into the country, and we know that. And so it is not about just the kinetic effects alone. It is about that, plus reducing visibility to recruit foreign fighters, plus reducing visibility to finance themselves. That creates the effects that we are beginning to see. And the enemy is beginning to struggle in a number of areas, in terms of governing, in terms of ability to control territory. So—

Mr. JONES. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Courtney.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses.

Again, just to go back for a moment regarding some of your testimony concerning our relationship with the Israeli Government and military. Again, General Dempsey has been before this committee a number of times and talked about how the mil-to-mil connection with Israel has a special sort of quality in nature that really is almost not matched anywhere in the world. And I was wondering, General, if you could sort of just kind of characterize that in terms of your own experience?

And, Ms. Wormuth, you know, you mentioned, you know, that this is something that is ongoing and that will be there with or without an agreement. I was wondering, again, if you could just sort of underscore that point?

General AUSTIN. And, sir, I believe the question is, our military-to-military relationship with Israel?

As you know, sir, Israel falls in European Command's area of responsibility. But we certainly—since it borders our region of responsibility or our area of responsibility, we certainly see a need to maintain good connectivity.

I had a great relationship with the former chief of defense there, with Benny Gantz. And I have not had a chance to meet the new—or his replacement, but I have met him on a VTC [video teleconference] where he and Benny and I, you know, along with General Breedlove, were able to share some ideas and concerns.

And so my hope—and I know this will be the case—is that we will continue to have a very, very strong relationship going forward. But, again, that—that—Israel is outside of my area of responsibility.

Secretary WORMUTH. I would just add to that, Congressman, by saying, you know, we have an incredibly strong relationship, defense relationship, with Israel. Secretary Carter spoke with Bogie Ya'alon within days of coming into office. And I am sure that will be, you know, one of his very close counterpart relationships.

We do many exercises with Israel. We have policy talks with them every year where we talk about everything from countering WMD [weapons of mass destruction] to exchanging lessons learned on homeland defense. We are very committed to preserving their qualitative military edge, and this is something that we talk about regularly and actively with the Israelis in terms of our arms sales to other countries in the region, for example, as well as our arms sales with Israel itself.

We have provided, in the last several years, over a billion dollars for Israel's missile defense programs from Iron Dome to David's Sling to Arrow. So we have a very, I think, robust and healthy and resilient defense relationship with Israel.

Mr. COURTNEY. Okay. Thank you.

Both of you have talked about the impact of sequestration in terms of executing your mission in that part of the world. I remember in March of 2013 when sequestration hit for the first time, the USS *Harry S. Truman*, which was scheduled to be deployed in the Middle East, had to tie up in Virginia for a number of months before this place finally worked things out.

And I guess the question is, is that, again, if we go into 2016 with sequester-level spending, General, do you have any testimony or comments regarding the impact of the number of carriers that might be available and how critical their mission is?

General AUSTIN. The number of—having a carrier battle group in the region is absolutely critical to us. And, of course, I remain concerned about our ability to do that going forward.

A good example of that is what we recently saw here in our counter-ISIL efforts. As things unfolded in Iraq and Syria, we were able to rapidly respond to that issue, that crisis because we had a carrier in the region and we were able to use that carrier to put up aircraft over Iraq to help the situation, gain situational awareness. And so without that degree of flexibility, it will be very, very difficult to address these kinds of emerging crisis in the future.

And so when you look at a region that has Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, there will continue to be challenges. And of course, I worry that we will have the resources to make sure that we can continue to work with our partners to address those challenges.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, recently we have heard a lot about Patriot batteries and the Army air defenders being stretched to their breaking point. And, in fact, recently deputy commander of the 32nd Air and Missile Defense Command stated this: "Today we have air and missile defense forces in nine countries. On any given day, nearly half of the Army's Patriot batteries are outside the continental United States and we have begun forward deploying THAAD [Terminal High Altitude Area Defense] batteries. We are rapidly approaching an inflection point where we face the risk of breaking our AMD, our air missile defense force."

I have two questions. First, as the imminent modernization of this system creates further strains on the deployment capability, what are your concerns as a combatant commander? And the second question is, what are the alternatives to drawing down force structure to make sure we don't deny our combatant commanders the capability they need?

General AUSTIN. Sir, on the first question, in terms of a combatant commander's perspective on this, while I certainly share the Army services' concerns in being able to manage the op [operations] tempo of its people, I think that is very, very important. But as you take a look at the emerging threats in the region, in the Central Region, certainly I remain concerned about Iran's ballistic missile capability. Now they continue to gain more capability and that capability is more accurate and more lethal as we go forward. So I think there is a need—there will remain a need for a good air defense capability to make sure that we protect our interest in the region and also to be able to work with our allies in the region.

In terms of ways to mitigate this, we are going to have to continue to work with the allies to help them develop capacity and capability to, again, not only take care of their own sovereign territory, but also add to, you know, the greater potential, the greater capability in the region. And we have a long way to go in that endeavor, but I think that that is—that is one of the major ways that we can look to address this issue going forward.

Mr. ROGERS. Have you or OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] or Joint Staff been talking with any of our allies about hosting some of these assets on a semi-permanent basis instead of us rotating them around?

General AUSTIN. We have not reached a decision to forward position any assets, sir. So we have continuing dialogue with our allies in the region in terms of what is possible, what is not possible. But, you know, certainly we have not taken a decision to forward position additional missile defense assets.

Mr. ROGERS. If you did, would it take some of the stress off by not having to rotate?

General AUSTIN. I think it would, sir. I think that would certainly be one way to address this.

Mr. ROGERS. Okay. Thank you.

That is all I have, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Tsongas.

Ms. TSONGAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you both for being here. Sorry we had that break that took us away for such a while.

You know, it has been said—and I think as we—in hearing Mr. Netanyahu's speech today and hearing your comments, that the challenges in the Middle East are like, at least, a three-dimensional chess game, and I think actually there are probably even more layers to that.

And I think the fact that we have been given the opportunity to consider an AUMF is very important. It allows the Congress to weigh in and think through the implications of what we are doing and how best to achieve success. But, again, given that it is so multidimensional, it is actually rather hard to grapple with. I think we are all struggling with that.

But I—and I think—I just happened to read in the paper today that Iran is actually playing a significant role in Tikrit. That their forces are there, you know, helping—helping push back on ISIL. And I think that highlights the complexity of the region. While we are trying to negotiate an agreement on their nuclear weaponization at the same time, we are taking—or taking advantage of their assistance. And I am curious, General Austin, how you think this through?

General AUSTIN. Well, it certainly is a complex situation, ma'am. Thanks.

Obviously, we are focused on helping—providing support to the country, the Government of Iraq in its efforts to counter ISIL. And this is a—this is an Iraqi effort. The Iraqis have to do this. We will enable their efforts with our air power, with our advice, and the assistance in any way we can. But at the end of the day, they have to be able to do this.

And, certainly, there are areas in the eastern part of the country that they have—leading up to this point that they have gained assistance from their neighbor with and the popular mobilization forces that are there working. So if you look at the areas in the eastern part of the country, Jalula, Khanaqin, they have worked together in those areas. And then leading up to this, they have done a number of things to get to this point.

So, in terms of sorting this out, again, our focus is on the Government of Iraq and working with the Government of Iraq to provide assistance to them to counter ISIL.

Ms. TSONGAS. So, in essence, you defer to their relationship with Iran in that instance. And then how do you see that complicates the next step, so that is the accommodation between the Shia and the Sunni so that, going forward, the government is representative of the country and we don't backtrack into the situation we are in today.

General AUSTIN. I think it is absolutely key that they make sure that they have provisions in place to accommodate the Sunnis and the Kurds. I think, you know, that lack of inclusion is what got us to this point, and I think the only way that we can ensure that we don't go back there is if we have the right steps taken by the government. So pressure needs to remain on the government to ensure that they do the right things.

Ms. TSONGAS. Another question. I think the other challenge of ISIS, in my mind, is that it is a little bit like Whac-a-Mole. You deal with it in one part of, you know, Iraq or Syria. And then, as you were saying in your testimony, now we are having to contend with it in North Africa.

How do you think through the—you know, preparing our military response to those possibilities without always being able or unless you have adequate intelligence, to assess where the next challenge is? It seems to me we run the risk of stretching ourselves very, very thin.

General AUSTIN. This is going to have to be an international effort going forward. And we are going to have to count on our strategic intelligence to lead that international effort as we go forward.

There are certain things that we know about ISIL. We know that it looks to exploit sectarian tensions. We know that it wants to be a caliphate. So it looks to control large swaths of territory, and it must govern that territory. But it is also a big business, and it requires enormous resources. So, as you look around the globe, I mean, it is more likely to go to those places that has ungoverned spaces and also places where it can acquire resources to support this incredible effort. And I think, if you can reduce those possibilities, you have a much better chance of staying ahead of this.

But there is a—there is a greater thing that I think, you know, feeds all of this and that is, you know, the narrative, the ideology that supports this, that feeds this. And I think there has got to be some things that are done to counter that ideology as well.

Ms. TSONGAS. Thank you, General.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Franks.

Mr. FRANKS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for being here.

Ms. Wormuth, I would kind of take off on a question Ms. Tsongas touched on. Can you provide us with the—sort of the official DOD policy on military cooperation with Iran forces on the ground in Iraq?

Secretary WORMUTH. Certainly, Congressman. Our policy is that we don't coordinate with Iranian forces on the ground in Iraq. We are not communicating with those forces. We are not coordinating with those forces, so that is our policy.

Mr. FRANKS. General, thank you for being here. Thank you for your dedication of your entire life to the cause of freedom. This committee is always grateful to people like you.

In terms of that question, expanded just slightly, with the ISF and Iraqi Shia militia many times working to fight the same enemy, there is a concern that any training on our part for the Iranian—or the Iraqi forces may turn into training and equipping the Iran Quds forces. And it seems like we could see Iran's presence kindle the sectarian violence that has sort of characterized this en-

tire issue in the first place. And, also, I am concerned that, to legitimize Iran's actions there, it may actually increase their leverage in not only the debate with the President but with the Iranian commitment to try to gain nuclear weapons.

So can you tell me any honest assessment of any cooperation between U.S. and Iranian forces and how do we train and equip the ISF without helping the Iranian forces or somehow getting tangled up in that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, there is no cooperation between us and the Iranian forces, as Ms. Wormuth has said. And we are going to have to count on the Iraqi Government to do those things necessary to, number one, ensure that things don't trend toward greater sectarian violence. And we encourage them to do that on a routine basis and—

But in terms of ensuring that, you know, our resources don't migrate over to Shia militia, there is no easy way to be absolutely certain that that can't happen. But I can tell you that we will do everything within our power to prevent that from happening. And, again, I think the first line of defense here has got to be the Iraqi Government. And we are focused on helping them, helping their legitimate forces to be successful in its endeavor.

Mr. FRANKS. Now, let me shift gears on you here just a moment and say, you know, it could be or would be your responsibility as combatant commander under the draft AUMF to ensure that the mission is accomplished against ISIS and yet also to make certain that American forces cannot engage in "enduring offensive ground operations."

And can you give this committee your best assessment of your ability to defeat, degrade, and destroy ISIS within 3 years while remaining true to the commitment not to having enduring offensive ground operations or executing those types of operations? Just your best military assessment.

General AUSTIN. I am confident—absolutely confident, that we can defeat ISIL. And I base that upon the progress that we have made to date. And as you know, we don't have large amounts of ground forces in Iraq, but we have been very effective in terms of enabling the Iraqi security forces and enabling the Peshmerga in the north, and they are having good effects. And we have also had good effects against this enemy in Syria. So I am very confident that going forward, we will get this done, we will defeat ISIL. And so in terms of an enduring requirement for Iraq, I don't see that requirement there because I think we will be able to get this done with the approach that we are taking.

At the end of the day, sir, this has to be—it has to be done by the Iraqis. And we have to put the measures in place that will ensure, you know, a lasting solution and not just a short-term military solution. And we are hopeful that the Iraqi Government will do the things that are necessary to ensure that lasting solution.

Mr. FRANKS. All right. Quickly before I lose my time, can you tell me what one thing that you might encourage this committee to try to offer policy-wise or resource-wise that would help to that end?

General AUSTIN. Sir, policy-wise, as much flexibility as you can give us as you consider the legislation going forward. I think flexibility in combatting an enemy like this is absolutely essential.

And then resource-wise, I need the ability to maintain capability forward deployed in the region.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Garamendi.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Wormuth and General Austin, thank you very much for your service and for the information you have provided for us today. I appreciate that.

I want to follow up on some of the questions that my colleague was asking a moment ago and very specifically, General, can ISIS be degraded and defeated without U.S. ground forces, i.e., infantry brigades, artillery, armor?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think they can, and they will. But they will use—we will use the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga forces to do this. And I think, you know, we have advisors on the ground and how we employ those advisors will be—you know I will make a decision on that and request for authorities on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I would assume that special forces on the ground, forward observers, and the like would be part of what you would want to be able to do?

General AUSTIN. Certainly. Part of the calculus, sir, and when I think I have reached a point where I need to employ that, then I will go back to my boss and request specifically for that opportunity.

Mr. GARAMENDI. And, Madam Secretary, the issue of enduring has been much discussed. It was discussed here last time we met last week. And I raised the question, let's be very specific. The power of the purse remains with us and if we simply don't allow the general to have money for the brigades, infantry, et cetera, is that restriction viable in your mind? And your mind also, General?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman, just to make sure I understand your question, are you saying that is it viable to not conduct enduring ground offensive operations if Congress doesn't provide the funding?

Mr. GARAMENDI. Well, if they won't provide the funding, you wouldn't be able to do it, period. I mean that is very clear. It is the power of the purse. You don't have money for that particular operation. And so the point that I am making here is that rather than some wishy-washy mushy language like "enduring," we simply say, General, you have all the money you need for all of the other things, except for ground operations, that is, infantry brigades, other artillery, armored, et cetera, but all the rest of it you have whatever you might need?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman, I think Congress clearly always has the power of the purse. The intent with the AUMF proposal was to include a reasonable limitation that made clear that we were not going to prosecute the campaign against ISIL in the same way that we were in Iraq, for example, in the last decade or in Afghanistan. Those kind of very large-scale operations.

I also just wanted to take the opportunity quickly—Congressman Franks asked the question—also, the 3-year clause in the AUMF, that is not intended to be an indication that we believe—certainly, that this Department believes that we will necessarily defeat ISIL within that timeframe. It is a recognition that the executive branch

and the legislative branch may well want to revisit the authorization at that time, but we think the campaign could well go on longer.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Well, I couldn't agree more with you. Presumably, we will continue to be in session year after year. And if, for example, we were to restrict the funding, as I just described, we could revisit it at any moment and provide whatever money might be necessary at that time. But it does provide a restriction going in as does the 3-year time limit.

And as I said last week, I think it is extremely important that the next Presidential campaign focus on this issue. And if you have a 3-year time limit, it most definitely will be focusing on the issue of how are we going to conduct ourselves militarily or other ways in the Middle East. I think that is extremely important that that happen in the next Presidential campaign.

I think we are just nearly out of time. General, I want to just review what you said and that is that ISIL can be defeated—degraded and defeated without U.S. ground forces?

General AUSTIN. Mr. Garamendi, we have ground forces in the country right now. But I think we are talking about brigades—battalions and brigades, large formations.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Exactly.

General AUSTIN. Sir, yes. My answer is yes. And I make that statement based upon what we are doing now.

ISIL is losing this fight. We are having significant effects on this enemy. We have got to do a lot more going forward. We always said that it would take time, but it will require the work of the Iraqi ground forces in order to get this done.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I appreciate that. And I would also assume that there may be a role for Jordan, Turkey, and other countries to have their troops on the ground. Would that be correct?

General AUSTIN. Sir, there is always that possibility. We invite anyone who wants to contribute to this and certainly those types of decisions are made by the individual countries as you know, sir.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Understood. Yeah. Thank you very much, General, and appreciate your support. And Madam Secretary, also.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Nugent.

Mr. NUGENT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Ms. Wormuth, and, General Austin, particularly for your service to this country.

You know, when I hear—when we talk about Iran and Iran's troops or advisors or whatever they are calling them assisting Iraq, what I worry is that the sectarian violence that Iran really does push. And in 2011, you know, when Maliki was beholding to Iran and Hezbollah actually attacked our troops with an IRAM [improvised rocket assisted mortar], Iranian warhead and killed five of our 1st Infantry Division kids the night that I was in Iraq, the night that my son was with the 1st Infantry Division.

So I wonder how this is going to play out if we allow Iran to have that kind of play today if, in fact, we do have to use some special forces or something other than a brigade-sized team to assist the Iraqis? How is that going to play out, particularly with Iran's past performance in supporting terrorism across the world but particu-

larly Hezbollah and particularly killing American troops just, you know, 4 years ago?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I certainly share your concern with the possibility of increasing sectarian activity as we go forward. And this is something that we continue to emphasize, again, with the Government of—to the Government of Iraq that, you know, they must be mindful of this. They must control the activities of Shia militia. They must guard against any kind of atrocities going forward of those elements. And they have to be, most importantly, inclusive of the Sunnis and the Kurds. And I think that is the biggest piece in this equation. And when that is done, I think you see the Sunnis coming into the government a bit more and balancing things out.

So I—you know, I was in Iraq. I was a commander of Iraq when that IRAM attack occurred. I was the first senior officer on the scene there to—you know, after that attack and worked with Colonel Gainey who was then Lieutenant Colonel Gainey. Now he is 0-6 [Colonel] Gainey. But some tremendous 1st [Infantry] Division soldiers there, great—great courage and great discipline.

But clearly I share your concern. We are going to do everything we can to encourage the Iraqi Government to stay focused on this, to be inclusive of the Sunnis and the Kurds. And I think, if they do that, I think this comes out in a better place.

Mr. NUGENT. Let me ask you this: Are we in a position within Iraq to have a good handle on regards to what the Iranian forces are doing in regards to the Shias within the country? Do we have a good handle on that or is that kind of we don't know for sure?

General AUSTIN. Sir, we do not coordinate with the Iranians or—you know, I mean, there is no communication between us and them.

Mr. NUGENT. Well I understand.

General AUSTIN. So absolute knowledge of what their intent is—is not always there. But, clearly, we have very good intelligence services and we have good overhead imagery and those types of things. So, you know, the activity in Tikrit was no surprise. You know, I saw this coming many days leading up to this. It is a logical progression of what they have been doing in the east of the country, but we don't coordinate with them.

Mr. NUGENT. I appreciate that.

And lastly a question on the AUMF. I think that, you know, you hear—I mean, there is a lot of discussion obviously. But—and we are worried about strategy. Strategy really needs to be larger than just ISIS. I mean, it really is. And I know the President doesn't want to go there, but it is radical extremism in Islam across the globe that is affecting us and our friends across the globe. And so I am worried, with AUMF, if it is just—and ISIS, does that really—is that really the strategy? I mean that is part of the strategy, but is that really where we need to be? Because you see it firsthand across the globe. And I know that all the combatant commands talk about it, I am sure.

Secretary WORMUTH. Why don't I take a crack at this quickly and then have General Austin pile on.

The AUMF proposal, first of all, as I am sure you are aware, doesn't have a geographic limitation, and that was very deliberate to address exactly the kinds of concerns that you have. Similarly,

there is the associated forces, which is designed to give us some breadth and discretion as to who we go after.

Mr. NUGENT. Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sorry I ran out of time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. O'Rourke.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Wormuth, General Austin said that ISIS could be defeated without using U.S. ground troops. I am assuming—and, General Austin, you alluded to this—that would be primarily through the use of Iraqi ground troops. Are there any other partners who have committed to joining those Iraqi ground troops to defeat ISIS in Iraq?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman, first of all, we have a number of the coalition partners who are participating with us in the air strike campaign.

Mr. O'ROURKE. I was speaking of ground troops, forces on the ground. So please answer that question.

Secretary WORMUTH. As General Austin has indicated, this is fundamentally a campaign that is being led by the Government of Iraq and any offer to have ground troops from another country come in would have to be accepted by the Iraqi Government. So those—

Mr. O'ROURKE. Is the answer that there are no other forces than Iraq—

Secretary WORMUTH. Right now, we only have advisors on the ground.

Mr. O'ROURKE. You said that part of our policy going forward would be to train and equip and advise those Iraqi ground forces. How much do we spend doing that between 2003 and 2013?

Secretary WORMUTH. Sir, I don't have an exact number off the top of my head, but I imagine it was many billions of dollars.

Mr. O'ROURKE. In the tens of billions of dollars.

And you also mentioned that we are going to use a whole-of-government approach. We are going to try to get the larger society together to find solutions. I am not sure that that affords us enough clarity to know exactly how this is going to be different than it was last time, never mind the increasing difficulty and complexity of Syria. We are just talking about Iraq right now.

Can you put those concerns to rest and tell us whether there is a plan to enlist other countries' ground military forces or if, in fact, you will be coming back to us if the Iraqi ground forces are insufficient to defeat ISIS to ask us to add additional U.S. ground forces to the mix?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman, at this time, you know, the AUMF does not envision—the proposal that this administration put forward doesn't envision large—it doesn't envision employment of large ground combat formations. So that is what we are asking for now.

In terms of the broader approach, I think fundamentally something that is different between today and in the past decade is we have much more of a partner in the Iraqi Government. You know,

Prime Minister Abadi wants us and wants the broader coalition there to help him.

Mr. O'ROURKE. How long is his term in office?

Secretary WORMUTH. I don't know off the top of my head.

Mr. O'ROURKE. You will not be able to predict his successor. Would you agree?

Secretary WORMUTH. No. That is true. But I am sure we will work to give the Iraqi Government as much advice as we can about the kinds of leader that they would need to succeed him whenever that happens.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Is the administration taking seriously proposals to rethink Iraq as a state, to rethink our partners in Iraq, like the Kurds who have proven to be our only reliable allies on the ground in the fight against ISIS to ensure that they have greater autonomy to maybe look at the fact that Syria and Iraq, to a degree, have arbitrary lines set up a hundred years ago that don't seem to be working for the peoples in those states and only seem to hold together when you have a brutal, repressive dictator, and the experiment in democracy so far in Iraq has been an abject failure? I don't know that I have heard from the administration and from you some larger strategy about how we are approaching problems there, outside of a military solution to the immediate threat of ISIS? Would you care to comment on any of that?

Secretary WORMUTH. Certainly. Sorry.

Fundamentally, our approach is based on a federal government in Baghdad. We believe that we have better prospects for success, both in terms of sustaining Iraq as a country, but also in terms of defeating ISIL, which is one of our fundamental concerns, doing that through a single Iraqi state as opposed to a partition solution, for example, you know, which has been discussed and was certainly discussed in years past.

So we are fundamentally taking the approach that we need to provide support through Baghdad to the Peshmerga, for example, who have been phenomenal partners and have been incredibly effective on the ground with the Sunni tribe elements, bringing them inside to get them into the fight.

But right now, our approach is based on a federal Iraq.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Could you—it is not outlined in the AUMF proposal from the President. Could you define “victory”?

Secretary WORMUTH. Certainly. I think victory is defined as when ISIL is no longer a threat to Iraq, to its existence, to our partners and allies in the region, and to the United States. And to get to that, I think, will take some time.

Mr. O'ROURKE. So as long as ISIL is seen as a threat to ourselves or any of our partners around the world, we have not won?

Secretary WORMUTH. I think that is fair.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Okay. Thank you.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Wenstrup.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you both for being here today to take our questions and inform us on many things.

My first question is: How many nations are considered part of the coalition of this fight in Iraq today?

Secretary WORMUTH. Sir, we have 60 countries with us, I believe, currently in the operation. And somewhere between a dozen and 15 are with us in the air strike campaign.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Okay. Who would you say are the top 5, maybe 10 contributors? Because 60 is a big number, and I don't know if that means somebody is donating a box of pens or really being engaged? So who would you say are the top contributors to this effort?

Secretary WORMUTH. I don't think I would want to get into a list of top contributors because different countries are contributing in different ways. As I said, we have about, you know, 12 to 15 who are very engaged in the military part of the campaign, whether in the air strikes or, also, in terms of contributing trainers or helping with the advise and assist mission.

But we also have countries that are working with us very closely on things like the counter-messaging campaign. So, for example, Qatar has been very focused on that. We also have countries that are very involved with us, across the whole coalition, on trying to address the counter-financing campaign. So really different countries are taking their particular strengths and applying them where they make the most sense.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And is it a good mix, say, of our traditional allies, like our NATO allies and Middle Eastern allies?

Secretary WORMUTH. Yes. I believe so. We have wide representation from NATO as well as from countries in the region.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Okay. Thank you.

Yeah.

General AUSTIN. If I could add to that. You know, I—you recall back on the 23rd of September when we began flying missions into Syria, that night we had five Sunni Arab-led nations that flew with us on that attack. And that was really remarkable. And I think it speaks to the conviction of the folks in the region to really want to stand up and deal with this very horrible entity, ISIL.

And for the most part, they have stayed with us and they are still flying, and I think that speaks volumes in and of itself as well. And there—as Ms. Wormuth said, there are a number of countries that are contributing in various ways from everything from helping the counter—the ideology to providing kinetic capability.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you.

I somewhat envision that we could have basically two coalitions, if you will. Because I think it would help the Arab nations to have their own coalition and not appear subservient to us and to our coalition, but that we are working together. And I think if we had that posture and that is what the world saw, it would help those nations engage better and serve us all a little bit better and coordinate on command and control.

Let me ask you one question as it goes to the AUMF, and I am really not trying to be flippant about this. But as a commander especially, I just don't—I would—maybe finish this sentence for me. You know, how does—finish this sentence: Publicly stating that we won't use ground forces or large brigades is a good idea because?

General AUSTIN. Sir, how about if I take another approach and give you my thoughts on—

Dr. WENSTRUP. With all due respect, I thought you might say that, sir. Go ahead.

General AUSTIN [continuing]. Present commander.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Go ahead.

General AUSTIN. So rest assured that I am going to ask for whatever I need to accomplish the mission as a commander. And, you know, I think we should—we should focus our efforts by providing good, clear mission statements and objectives. But as a commander on the ground or commander of the region—in the region, you expect for me to ask for what it is I need to be successful, and so you can count on me always doing that.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I appreciate that. And what I don't want to do is ever tie your hands on that. I think it is great if we can use other forces, but at the same time, I would not want to tie your hands and put you in that position.

Thank you very much. I do appreciate it.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Gabbard.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for being here.

Ms. Wormuth, following up on a statement that you made a few minutes ago, why is it the administration's position that a single federal Iraqi state is necessary to defeating ISIS when the reality is that it is this single federal Shia-led, Iranian-influenced central government in Baghdad that has oppressed the Sunni people, created the oxygen for ISIS to come in and take advantage where the Sunnis have been forced to look in that direction in order to escape the oppression and persecution of this Shia-led government, and that this is the main cause for ISIS growing in its presence and strength in Iraq today?

Secretary WORMUTH. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question.

I think what I would say is, to date, that the previous government in Iraq, under Maliki, was very problematic and did create many of, I think, the characteristics or the dynamics that you are speaking of on the ground.

Ms. GABBARD. So understanding that, how can the administration place its hopes on the success of this on an individual person, in this new President when you have a parliament to deal with, you have Shia militias who are on the ground operating, sometimes in alliance, sometimes on their own, and you have the Iranian Revolutionary Guard on the ground?

Secretary WORMUTH. First, I would say that I don't think we are putting our confidence in a single person. Certainly, I think, you know, we think Prime Minister Abadi is a much more promising partner than what we had in Maliki, but we also are working with his entire government. And he has taken some steps that I think are indicative of his commitment personally but also more broadly of his government to try to take a more inclusive approach, things like signing the oil deal with the Kurds, things like submitting the national guard legislation to the Council of Representatives.

And while, you know, I would not dispute at all that it is a very difficult political environment there and it is going to be very challenging to help the Abadi administration continue to have a more

inclusive approach, we think that that is a more promising pathway than seeing the country break apart into divisions where, you know, a Kurdistan in the north, a Shiastan, a Sunnistan, as, you know, some people in the think tank community have talked about, those would only harden all of the divisions, I think, that we have seen that have created many of the complexities. And an approach that tries to bring those together, we believe, is a more promising approach, without underestimating how difficult that will be.

Ms. GABBARD. To follow up, General Austin, on a previous comment that you made to this point about the necessity of, I think specifically you said the inclusion of Sunnis and Kurds is essential, and that the government must be pressured to do that.

And while there have been some steps and some rhetoric in that direction, really what it comes right down to, there is very little evidence that that is happening, where we see the right rhetoric but still on the ground we are not seeing the Kurds getting the heavy weaponry and the arms that they need, and they have been our most dependable ground force on the ground.

We have the Sunnis who are coming here to Washington saying we are not getting what we need from this central government in Iraq and this is not just something long term; it is relevant now with this attack in Tikrit. So I am wondering specifically if you can address, what is the plan to ensure that the Sunni stronghold, like Tikrit and Mosul, have a plan or an agreement in place for the Sunnis to be in charge of security and governance for these places once the attack is successful and ISIS is driven out?

General AUSTIN. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I think the plan is we have to continue to engage and influence the Iraqi Government. And you asked why this is important, why we want to continue to do this. Iraq is an important country. It has got borders with allies that are key to us: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. And what we are doing is working to counter an evil that we have not seen before: ISIL. And I think unless we help in this endeavor, we can look for this thing to spread over into the neighboring countries. And, again, the goal of this enemy is to establish a caliphate to control more turf.

So I think you are right, Congresswoman. I think we have to do everything in our power to make sure we continue to engage the Iraqi Government and make sure—

Ms. GABBARD. Sorry, General Austin, my time is about to run out.

Specifically with Tikrit and Mosul, is there a plan in place for the Sunnis to have governance over security on these towns post-attack?

General AUSTIN. Well, the Iraqi Government has got to put such a plan into action, and that is the intent, I am sure. But in terms of specifics of the plan to do that, at this point, I could not lay that out for you. But that must be the way ahead so—

Ms. GABBARD. I agree.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Stefanik.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to both of the witnesses here today.

We have spoken a lot about Iraq, Iran, and I want to turn toward Syria.

Ms. Wormuth, what is the U.S. policy toward the Assad regime? And the reason I am asking this question is, I believe that the brutality of the Assad regime has contributed greatly to the ability for ISIS to rise and gain strongholds in Syria.

Secretary WORMUTH. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question.

Our policy towards the Assad regime specifically is that Assad has completely lost his legitimacy and his legitimacy to govern. He has created a situation where there is tremendous instability in his country. He is not really governing much of his country. There have been over 200,000 casualties, I believe, to date. And what we have to do, our view, is that there isn't a strictly military solution to that problem. What we need to do is to find a political settlement that would have a transition where Assad leaves the government.

And in terms of the ISIL challenge in Syria, what we are trying to do is develop a partner on the ground. We obviously don't have the same kind of partner on the ground that we have in Iraq, but we believe to be able to push ISIL out in Syria, we need to build that. And that is what our Department's train and equip program is designed to do.

Ms. STEFANIK. So do you agree with me when I state that the rise of ISIS in Syria is related to the brutality of the Assad regime in providing the circumstances that ISIS has been able to recruit supporters?

Secretary WORMUTH. I would say that the tremendous instability in Syria has certainly been fertile ground for ISIL to spread.

Ms. STEFANIK. And my other question is, so just to delve further on our policy towards Syria, is it that we oppose the regime in principle but have a policy of taking no actions that would harm the regime's survival?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congresswoman, I think, again, our view is that fundamentally what we need to do is pursue a diplomatic and political solution that sees Assad leaving that government; that militarily there isn't a solution.

You know, I wouldn't say we are taking no action. We have an extensive humanitarian assistance program underway to try to help support the Syrian population. We have worked with neighbors in the region like Turkey and Jordan and others to try to enhance their security as they deal with all of the refugee flows, but ultimately, we need to find a diplomatic solution.

Ms. STEFANIK. I believe, Ms. Wormuth, with all due respect, that the administration's lack of leadership in dealing with the Assad regime and having a coherent Syria policy has led us to where we are today.

Thank you for representing the views, but I fundamentally disagree.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank the gentlelady.

Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And General Austin, thank you very much for your service.

And Ms. Wormuth, thank you for your service as well.

Ms. Wormuth, you said earlier that Maliki sectarian approach to governing is how we got here, and there are a lot of nodding heads around the room. What are we doing in our plan going forward to ensure that that doesn't happen again?

Secretary WORMUTH. That is a great question, Congressman. You know, fundamentally, one of the lines of effort in our counter-ISIL campaign is governance and it is about helping the Iraqis, again, develop a stronger government that takes a very inclusive approach to how they are trying to bring everyone together, bring in the Kurds, bring in the Sunnis, bring in other religious minorities, for example.

You know, and fundamentally, this is primarily the work of the State Department, but it is a major emphasis in terms of what we are trying to do. We don't believe—without that focus and without that focus on building a stronger, inclusive government in Baghdad; we do not believe that the military campaign on its own will succeed.

Mr. MOULTON. So can you just name one thing specifically that you are doing differently from, say, the period of 2010 to 2013? When I served in Iraq last in 2008, we had a very heavy hand on the Iraqi Government. We were very involved in their affairs. We made sure to keep Prime Minister Maliki within the lanes so that he wouldn't become too sectarian. I wish we had a prime minister that didn't require that kind of guidance, but we did and we provided it. But it seems that that was lost. So what specifically are we doing differently this time around?

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, Congressman, I think one thing we are doing differently—I mean, I think I would say fundamentally, ultimately part of why things did not succeed in Iraq the first time is because when the United States left—and that was because, again, Maliki, as you know well, did not want the United States to stay and was not willing to submit the kinds of agreements to the Council of Representatives—all of the things, many of the things that we worked with them on through those many years started to dissipate when we left. And I think fundamentally one of the lessons from that this time is that we have to partner with the Iraqis, but they have to want it for themselves, at least as much as we do.

And so we are now, I think, trying to provide advice to them, political advice, governance advice, military advice to help them build up their institutions, but fundamentally emphasize that they are a sovereign country and they have to be in the lead. And I think that is going to be challenging, but unless we want to stay there for an indeterminate period, they have to be able to do what needs to be done on their own.

Mr. MOULTON. What I want to make sure is, is not just that we don't have to stay there for an indeterminate period but that we don't have to come back. And I will tell you, as someone who fought during the surge, it is not very comforting to hear that we are just going to leave that up to the Iraqis, that ultimately we are just going to say pass it off to them and maybe they will succeed and maybe they won't and we will be right back.

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, I think what I would say, Congressman, is we are not going to leave them abruptly. You know, we are working with them in partnership in a whole range of ways, diplomatic, political, economic, military, trying to help them do what needs to be done across the whole range of challenges that they face. And we will continue to work with them. Again, this campaign against ISIL we don't expect to end anytime soon.

Mr. MOULTON. General Austin, could you comment on this as well. I mean, you were there during part of this period. What specifically do you see being done differently this time around to ensure we don't have to again see our military effort go in vain and then have to come back again 3 or 4 years down the road?

General AUSTIN. Well, we certainly have learned some lessons from the past in terms of the requirement to remain engaged with the Iraqi leadership.

But I think we have to use more than just the influence that the military brings. We have to use, you know, economic influence, international pressure, and a host of other things to put pressure on this government—

Mr. MOULTON. And are we doing that?

General AUSTIN. I think so. I think we are increasing, but—

Mr. MOULTON. So if you think so, it just doesn't give me a lot of confidence that this plan is actually being executed.

General AUSTIN. Understand, sir. I think—when I say that, I say that, you know, this is a young government and we are using every lever in the inventory to influence it. And—

Mr. MOULTON. General, with all due respect, I was in Baghdad 2 weeks ago, and that was not the story I heard on the ground which was that we were using all these levers. I mean, Iran has a very active effort to influence the Iraqi Government. It doesn't seem like ours even is a shadow of that.

General AUSTIN. I can't speak to how much—I can say that Iran's influence is growing in Iraq, but how much they have, I can't speak to that. But I can tell you that we recognize the need to use everything that we can to influence and shape activities, and we will continue to stay after this, sir.

Mr. MOULTON. If I may ask just one final question. You have talked about how important a diplomatic solution is in Syria. Who is our political partner there?

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, that is one of the many challenges we have in Syria, is that the Syrian opposition council is the primary, as I am sure you know, opposition entity, but it has been fractured over time. And so we are working—part of what the State Department is doing—

Mr. MOULTON. Do we have a political partner?

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, we have—again, we are working with the opposition council. We also are obviously working with other countries who also believe that what is needed is a transition for Assad out of the government. But we are certainly—we don't have a partner in, in the Syrian Government, but we are working to build up the opposition council.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Very important questions.

Ms. Hartzler.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you so much for being here today. Very important questions and topics. And one that I think hasn't been touched on, I am very concerned about, is the basically eradication of Christians in Iraq. At one time, over 1.5 million Christians there. Now we estimate between, what, 200 and 300,000 perhaps. Maybe you have some insights on the numbers there. But certainly that is the birthplace of many of famous Christian historic sites.

And the reports last week of ISIL burning hundreds or thousands of years old documents and destroying religious sites is certainly very, very disturbing.

So first, I was wondering if you could give me an update on the situation for Christians there, both in their persons and their safety, how many are still there, what their situation is, their well-being, but then also give me an update on the ISIL strategy and how many historic sites have been destroyed?

Secretary WORMUTH. Congresswoman, what I would like to do is to give you a much more specific laydown of some of the questions that you are asking for the record, if that would be all right. But I think it is fair to say that, you know, we very much share your concern about the status of Christians in Iraq, but also other religious minorities, obviously.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 103.]

Secretary WORMUTH. ISIL has persecuted and prosecuted their barbaric approaches on Christians all over the country, and we are very disturbed about that, and it is one of the many reasons we are trying to defeat them in Iraq. I think something we have emphasized particularly again with the Abadi government is that as these military operations take place, it is very important that the ISF forces and the popular mobilization militias not conduct atrocities as they go into these towns.

And Prime Minister Abadi was very vocal this morning saying that he has the responsibility and the Iraqi security forces have the responsibility to protect all of Iraqi citizens. But we share your concerns, and I would certainly like to get you a more detailed report for the record. But General Austin may have more specifics to share.

General AUSTIN. I agree. We will take that for the record, Ms. Wormuth.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 103.]

General AUSTIN. I would just say, Congresswoman, that having served in Iraq three times and now the Central Command commander, I have spent a lot of time with senior leaders, senior Iraqi leaders, and work with them on issues involving Christian and other religious minorities. And I can tell you that they value—they treasure the Christian population as a part of their community, their environment. And so when we saw Christians leaving Baghdad, for example, several years ago, they were concerned about that.

So they want this population to be a part of their environment, and I think that we will have to continue to work with the govern-

ment to ensure that as we go forward that they are doing the right things to protect these minorities.

Mrs. HARTZLER. When can I expect a response back on—for the record?

Secretary WORMUTH. I am sure we can get you something by the end of the week, ma'am.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Okay. That would be great.

Now in the Nineveh, there is a lot of Christians there. And I read an article last week how an independent group has come in to help train some of the people who live there, how to defend their own villages, you know, independent of us.

But in the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act], we put over \$1 billion in there to help train local forces against ISIL. Are we targeting and helping to specifically train some Iraqi Christians? Are they receiving any of the funds that we designated for this?

Secretary WORMUTH. As of right now, Congresswoman, the funds for the Iraqi train and equip program are largely being spent on training the nine Iraqi Army brigades and the three Peshmerga brigades. I think about almost \$19 million of that \$1.3 billion is going to equip Sunni tribal elements.

But to my knowledge, that money is not being spent on training other groups outside of the ISF and the Sunni tribes.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Do you think that might be a good idea since ISIL is trying to exterminate them?

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, Congresswoman, there are, again, I think what we have been trying to do is work the train and equip program through the Iraqi Government. We could certainly talk with them.

I know they—General Austin may have more information about some of these other training programs that the Iraqi Government is doing itself of more local populations.

General AUSTIN. That has been our approach in the past, and certainly it will be our approach going forward. I think this is best done in working with the Iraqi Government because at the end of the day, as we transition, they are going to have to be the folks that really continue to take care of these elements.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Well, I am encouraged to hear that you think the Iraqi Government is concerned as well and cares about them. And I would ask you to visit with them specifically about this, ask them to reach out to these groups and specifically try to train them, because it would just be a travesty of historic proportions if this area has no Christians where so many of them have been there for thousands of years.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. McSally.

Ms. MCSALLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, I want to switch to the topic of combat search and rescue [CSAR]. And I was retired colonel A-10 pilot but also ran the Joint Search and Rescue Center for CENTCOM Forward for JTF-SWA [Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia] in the early days of the Afghanistan operations.

And my concern is, with our operations in Iraq and Syria, I have been hearing from some colleagues that we have limitations on the combat search and rescue. The Jordanian pilot, as you know, has strategic implications with how he was murdered in a horrific way.

And we have got our pilots flying single-engine F-16s into Iraq and Syria today. And in order to make sure that if they have to eject, even if they are not shot down, that we have somebody overhead right away, on-scene commander and then somebody else right behind them to immediately locate, communicate, and protect them, shoot anything that moves, that comes anywhere near them, in that geography you can't hide. It takes a very robust capability of ground-alert assets, airborne-alert assets.

The A-10, which I flew, is the only one that provides a rescue mission commander, SANDY One and SANDY Two, to be able to get to them and then the helicopter should go in and get them. And we have got to snatch them right away, as you know, because if they get picked up then it is disastrous consequences, not just for them and their family but strategically for our country. Can you imagine if we had now an American pilot that is the next one captured?

So I know you know this is a challenge, but my question is, and I am asking for a classified briefing, what was the CSAR posture when we first started flying sorties there and specifically when the Jordanian pilot ejected, and has it changed since then? And are you limited at all from the arbitrary 3,100-person boots-on-the-ground cap by this administration to make sure that we have a posture that provides what I just described; that we have a covenant with those that are flying sorties are on the ground; that we are going to go get them, that we are going to rescue them.

I have concerns from talking to my colleagues in the military that there is a pretty damning after-action report from the Jordanian pilot situation, and I am deeply concerned that we don't have the combat search and rescue capability.

Also, if you only have 12 A-10s over there and they are the only ones that can do the SANDY mission plus close air support, why don't we bring more over? What are your limitations? What can we do moving forward?

General AUSTIN. Let me assure you, Congresswoman, that I won't put one pilot in the air if I don't feel like I have the adequate means to recover those pilots. In working with my senior airmen and my air component, I think they have done a masterful job of ensuring that we have adequate coverage in a number of places to address our CSAR issues.

As you know, we have forward-deployed CSAR capabilities currently, and we also are looking to perhaps put CSAR capability in other places, like Turkey, and we continue to work that.

So I am confident that we have the adequate means to take care of our pilots, and if I feel that the risk has increased to the point where I need to, we will put CSAR assets in the air while the mission is being conducted. And we have done that and we will continue to do that.

Ms. MCSALLY. So you feel that there is no limitations right now? You have this CSAR posture that you need in order to make sure that we can rescue anybody who has to eject?

General AUSTIN. I think we have adequate CSAR capability. In this business, as you know, there is no such thing as enough, and so if I can get more, I will get more.

And if I can position assets in Turkey, and we believe we can, we will move forward and do that.

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay. And is the 3,100 boots-on-the-ground limitation impacting at all bringing in a more robust CSAR capability forward-deployed to make sure that we can be true to that covenant?

General AUSTIN. I think we have adequate capability to take care of our troops with what we have on the ground and what we can potentially put into other places. I think that will increase that capability.

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay. Great.

Again, for the record, I would like a very detailed classified briefing on the CSAR posture and that after-action report on the Jordanian pilot. And I look forward to working with your staff to further discuss this important issue.

General AUSTIN. We look forward to providing you that, ma'am. And by the way, in response to your point that you made earlier about a damning report, after-action report, I know of no such report.

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay. Great. I look forward to following up with you, then.

Thank you.

I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Let me touch on a couple things that we haven't quite gotten to yet today: One is Yemen. General, for several years now we have heard that the most serious threat against our homeland, as far as terrorism goes, has emanated from Yemen, with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP]. How do you evaluate that threat today, and what effect does the overthrow of government there have on our counterterrorism operations to diminish that threat?

General AUSTIN. I will take the first stab at this, sir, and if Ms. Wormuth wants to contribute then certainly, with your permission, I will ask her to do so.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, we have always said, is a very significant threat or a serious threat. We know that there are folks in that organization that have tried to export violence to our homeland, and so we remain focused on this extremist organization and we feel that there is a need to keep pressure on it.

We have found that over the years, not only in Yemen but in other places around the region and across the globe, that the best way to counter these types of threats is to limit the amount of ungoverned spaces that they have available to operate out of. And so the more that we can do to help train and equip and advise host nations to control their own sovereign spaces, the less of an opportunity that there is for these organizations to export mischief to other places.

Also, their ability to counter—host nations' ability to counter these types of threats, I think, is also important. So what we have done over the years is when we had a viable government in place that was willing to work with us, we have worked with them to in-

crease their capability so that they can do more to control their own sovereign spaces. And that certainly has helped us in countering some of the extremist organizations.

In addition to that, you also obviously have to keep pressure on the organization, making sure that you understand what is going on with the organization and that where possible, you bring, you know, key operatives to justice when that opportunity is presented.

The CHAIRMAN. Yeah, but General, let me go back and try again. Today, what is the threat like from AQAP in Yemen against our homeland? Is it still serious?

And secondly, what effect has the overthrow of the government had on our ability to diminish that threat?

Secretary WORMUTH. Chairman, if you don't mind, I am happy to—

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I think it is really a military question not a policy question.

General AUSTIN. Yeah. So there is still a significant threat, sir, and so without the—and I apologize for not directly answering your question. But without the government fully operational, that makes it more difficult to do the things that I described earlier, to keep pressure on this organization, and so the threat will increase over time.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you.

They have called votes, so I am trying to get to several things and I don't mean to cut you short. I will get to Mrs. Walorski in just a second but I want to cover a couple things.

Ms. Wormuth, I was with President Ghani a few weeks ago when he said that he would like for us not to reduce the number of troops we have in Afghanistan for the remainder of the year. We are going to have General Campbell here tomorrow. But the question I have got is where is that request in the administration, and when is it going to be answered?

Secretary WORMUTH. Thank you, Chairman.

We are very much aware, obviously, of that request. President Ghani has asked us to consider giving him more—or he has asked us to perhaps have some flexibility in terms of the glide slope of the approach, and we are actively discussing that right now. And I think it will very much be a topic when the President comes here later this month.

The CHAIRMAN. So you think it is going to hang at least through the end of the month, at least? I am concerned that, on the current trajectory, we are reducing the number of people throughout the country, we are reducing our intelligence-gathering capability throughout the country, we are reducing a variety of capabilities we have throughout the country, and meanwhile we are studying it.

Secretary WORMUTH. Congressman—or excuse me, Chairman—

The CHAIRMAN. It doesn't matter. Mac is fine.

Secretary WORMUTH. Well, I certainly wouldn't go that far.

We are taking President Ghani's request very seriously, and it is being discussed at the highest level. The President has not made a decision yet, but I think we are very aware of the importance of

this request and want to do what we can to make the most of the next 2 years.

So, again, I think that will be a discussion when the President gets here, but it is being looked at a very high level and in great detail.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, as you can tell, I am frustrated at what we are losing in the meantime.

Let me ask one more thing and then I will yield to Mrs. Walorski.

General, last week in the Senate, General Allen, who is now the special Presidential envoy, said that “enduring” in the administration’s AUMF proposal could mean 2 weeks or it could mean 2 years.

And then Secretary [of State] Kerry also testified in the Senate that “enduring” could mean weeks and weeks but then he came over to the House [of Representatives], and he said, well, it could mean months, not years.

So if this passed as submitted, you are the combatant commander responsible for implementing this AUMF, and so my question to you is, how long is enduring? Is it two weeks? Two months? Two years?

General AUSTIN. Well, I think it is—you would have to evaluate the requirements on a mission-by-mission basis, and I would hope that, we could be—you know, when I am given objectives and goals and missions that they are specific enough for me to lay out how long it will take.

But in terms of, you know, a mark on the wall of exactly how long enduring is, that is ill defined or not defined.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, Mr. Smith and I got a letter from one of your predecessors, General Mattis, last week, who basically argued that we should not put restrictions as far as the kind of capability that we would limit our military commanders from using to achieve those objections.

I heard you tell Mr. Franks a while ago that you thought more flexibility was better. I presume that that would be your outlook. If you are given a mission, you would just as soon have all means necessary—or at your disposal—available to carry out that mission?

General AUSTIN. That is correct, Chairman. And I would ask for whatever I thought was necessary to accomplish the mission.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Walorski.

Mrs. WALORSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, you have been deployed on several operational tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. What limitations have other AUMFs placed on your missions and operational abilities, number one; number two, if in your operational experience you have been most effective as accomplishing your mission without AUMF limitations, why would this AUMF provide you with the quote, unquote, “flexibility” you need to accomplish this mission?

General AUSTIN. Well, you know, certainly, I have been involved in, over the last decade-plus, in fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. And we have had what we needed to have to accomplish our goals and objectives in both instances.

In terms of any limitations that this current—the proposed AUMF would place on us, the way it is laid out to—I think we will have what we need, we will have the flexibility to address the counter-ISIL campaign.

And so to accomplish what has been given to me in this current mission set, I think we have the flexibility to get the work done.

Mrs. WALORSKI. And just reflecting again on what the chairman said, but, you know, I was heavily impacted last week when I read the letter from General Mattis. And—when he talked about to the committee last week that they should not set any arbitrary guidelines, AUMF should not establish geographic limits, AUMF should put the enemy on notice that we will use all military capabilities, even if it includes ground forces. And we have heard other, just through the news and just through talk, other senior military leaders saying the same thing.

And I have got to believe, with him being your predecessor, would you not agree with General Mattis' views, that we simply cannot have these kind of ground game rules, number one, already established; and number two, we are telling ISIL and all interested parties exactly what we are not going to do?

General AUSTIN. Well General Mattis is a great friend, a guy who I respect a lot. And I will tell you that we agree on some things; we don't agree on everything. But in this case, Congresswoman, my thoughts are the more flexibility that I can have, the better it is for me in terms of prosecuting this kind of a fight.

Mrs. WALORSKI. Wouldn't it be easier to have an AUMF that says destroy ISIL, period? Wouldn't that give you unbelievable flexibility, unbelievable authority, and send a strong message to the other side, to the enemy camp that there is number one mission in this country, and all the bounds are off, all the rules are off, and you are in charge of a command that can go and do what the American people want, which is to destroy ISIL, even if they show up in Afghanistan, even if they show up in other places where we already know there is connections and networks being made?

General AUSTIN. Well, again, the more flexibility I can have as a commander—

Mrs. WALORSKI. Would you support that kind of AUMF, sir, that said destroy ISIL?

General AUSTIN. I am confident I will never get that kind of an AUMF, but I take your point.

Mrs. WALORSKI. I appreciate.

I yield back my time, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Coffman, do you have something right quick?

Mr. COFFMAN. No, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay.

Thank you, all, for your patience. A vote came just in time.

And so we appreciate both of you and the challenges that you face in sorting through a very difficult, messy situation in the Central Command area of responsibility.

Thank you again for being here today, and we will look forward to further discussions.

With that, the hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:44 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MARCH 3, 2015

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

MARCH 3, 2015

**Testimony of
Under Secretary of Defense Christine Wormuth
U.S. Department of Defense**

**House Armed Services Committee
“The President’s Proposed Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against ISIL and
U.S. Policy, Strategy, and Posture in the Greater Middle East”
March 3, 2015**

Thank you, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee for inviting me to testify today on DoD’s strategy and posture in the greater Middle East. Secretary Carter recently returned from the region – his first official travel as Secretary – which was an opportunity to gain greater insight into the pressing issues that will be critical to the success of the counter ISIL campaign. The Secretary is also on the Hill today testifying before the Senate and will return for budget hearings over the coming weeks to discuss the full range of our Departmental priorities. Today, I’d like to focus on our defense policy objectives and discuss some of the specific challenges and opportunities in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR).

Our forces in the USCENTCOM AOR are confronting some of the most difficult global security challenges. Our nation has been engaged in conflict with al Qaeda and associated forces for over a decade in Afghanistan. In Iraq and Syria, the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has not only destabilized those two countries, but presented a new dimension to the global violent extremist threat. Iran poses a host of security challenges, to include its nuclear ambitions and support for terrorist groups in the Middle East. All of these challenges are made more difficult by ongoing budget uncertainty and fiscal pressures here at home. Given these challenges, I appreciate the opportunity to review our defense policy objectives and priorities in the region. It is a pleasure, also, to be here with General Austin—we are lucky to have him serving as the CENTCOM Combatant Commander. He is also a terrific reminder of the quality of all the men and women we have serving in the region today.

Over the last four years, the Middle East has experienced significant change. The aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings will redefine the region as well as relationships among communities and between citizens and their governments. These realities have forced us to take a hard look at near- and long-term goals for U.S. engagement in the region. Although the Department will continue to face many important challenges in the Middle East, two critical issues are at the top of our agenda. The first is how to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. The second is preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

In Iraq and Syria, the Department is working with our partners across nine lines of effort: 1) supporting effective governance in Iraq, 2) denying ISIL safe haven, 3) building partner capacity, 4) enhancing intelligence collection on ISIL, 5) disrupting ISIL’s finances, 6) exposing ISIL’s true nature, 7), disrupting the flow of foreign fighters, 8) protecting the homeland, and 9) providing humanitarian support. The Department of Defense has lead responsibility in denying ISIL safe haven and building partner capacity, so I would like to highlight how we are postured to counter ISIL and outline briefly the success we are having in that effort.

More than 60 countries are participating in the global coalition against ISIL. Over 2600 U.S. service men and women are currently in Iraq supporting the Government of Iraq along these lines of effort. We are conducting operations from a number of bases throughout the Middle East, with many of those partners also conducting combined air, “advise and assist,” and train and equip operations with us.

In terms of effects, to date the coalition has conducted over 2,450 airstrikes against ISIL targets, over 1350 in Iraq and nearly 1100 in Syria. We are taking out ISIL’s fighters, their commanders, over a thousand vehicles and tanks, over 200 oil and gas facilities, the infrastructure that funds their terror, as well as over 20 training camps and more than two thousand fighting positions, checkpoints, buildings, and barracks in Iraq and Syria. As a result of this effort, ISIL’s momentum has been blunted, its ability to mass and maneuver forces has been degraded, its leadership cells have been pressured or eliminated, its command-and-control and supply lines have been disrupted. In short, we have put ISIL on the defensive.

But countering ISIL would not be possible without local partners in the lead. To build partner capacity in Iraq, U.S. and Coalition partners are supporting the Government of Iraq (GOI) by assisting with training, equipping, and advising its Armed Forces. Last summer we stood up our “advise and assist” teams to partner with local forces and early in the year we began training these forces at 4 sites across Iraq: I was able to visit Taji recently and see firsthand the partnership that we have undertaken with the Iraqi forces. With the help of Congress, the Iraq Train and Equip Fund will help us train and equip three brigades of Peshmerga forces, and nine Iraq Army brigades, as well as Sunni tribal forces.

In addition to our efforts in Iraq, we are working with our coalition partners to build the capabilities of the moderate Syrian opposition—with training of the first class of vetted opposition elements set to begin later this month. The goal is to train moderate Syrian recruits to defend the Syrian people; stabilize areas under opposition control; empower trainees to go on the offensive against ISIL; and promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria. Our partners in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and others have offered strong support to host and quickly stand up the program. U.S. forces in the region strengthen our partners’ ability to fight terrorism locally, but it will be Iraqi forces and Syrian fighters who will secure the gains against ISIL and inflict a lasting defeat.

As you know, the President has developed and transmitted to Congress an Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) that would demonstrate whole-of-government support for him to successfully prosecute the armed conflict against ISIL within reasonable limitations. We believe that we have the legal authorities necessary to continue to conduct the current campaign against ISIL. However, the President has been clear that he wants to work with Congress to pass a bipartisan AUMF specifically tailored to address the threat posed by ISIL. Enacting a bipartisan ISIL-specific AUMF would provide a clear and powerful signal to the American people, to our allies, and to our enemies that the United States stands united to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. I would like to briefly highlight some important aspects for the Department of the proposed AUMF.

First, the President's authorization does not include a geographic limitation. Although we are not currently planning operations in countries other than Iraq or Syria, we believe it would be a mistake to advertise to ISIL that there are safe havens for them outside of Iraq and Syria, by limiting the authorization to specific countries.

Second, the President's AUMF includes a three-year sunset. The sunset provision is not based on a determination that the campaign against ISIL will be over in three years. Rather, the President believes that three years is an appropriate period of time before the two branches of government assess the progress we have made against ISIL and review these authorities again.

Finally, the President's AUMF does not authorize "enduring offensive ground combat operations." It does authorize the full range of activities we anticipate needing in the fight against ISIL. It provides DoD with the authority and flexibility to conduct ground combat operations in more limited circumstances, such as rescue operations involving U.S. or coalition personnel or Special Forces operations to take military action against ISIL leadership.

In all, enacting this AUMF is an important way to demonstrate to the Armed Forces who are fighting that the President and the U.S. Congress are solidly behind them and that our country is united in its resolve to defeat ISIL.

Defeating ISIL is a major focus and challenge, but so is Iran. As the President has made clear, his top priority is preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Iran's nuclear ambitions remain a consistent area of concern for the Department. We remain hopeful that the P5+1 negotiations will result in a comprehensive and verifiable deal. The combination of international pressure, sanctions, and diplomacy *have* been effective in convincing Iranian leadership to come to the negotiating table, and there *have* been developments that signal a willingness to abide by the terms of a peaceful nuclear program. And as President Obama has said more than once, we are not going to make a bad deal.

DoD helps underwrite negotiations with our robust posture and capabilities in the region. We maintain significant capabilities in our ground, air, and naval presence in the region. This includes our most advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets; significant ballistic missile defense capabilities; fighter aircraft; and ships. As the President has said publicly, we will do whatever is necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, including using military force if necessary, and the Department is postured to do it.

Looking beyond the nuclear program, we have significant concerns regarding Iran's other destabilizing activities in the Middle East. Iran's ongoing support for terrorist groups and support to the Assad regime does not bode well for a long-term political solution in Iraq or Syria and continues to pose a threat to our regional allies and partners. We have an enduring commitment to regional stability and our presence reflects the Department's vigilance regarding a number of Iran's malign activities. Even if we are successful in neutralizing the nuclear threat through hard-nosed diplomacy, we will continue to support U.S. government efforts to counter Iran and the full range of threats it poses.

As we work to degrade and defeat ISIL, and to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, we remain committed to moving to a smaller force in Afghanistan and consolidating the gains made over the past decade of international support to the Afghan government. The U.S. mission in Afghanistan has helped support the Afghan people, and has protected U.S. national interests by working with local partners to build the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces so that they can serve as a legitimate line of defense against terrorists seeking to exploit Afghanistan's territory. It is clear that much work still needs to be done, but we have made positive strides. President Ghani sees the U.S. and NATO presence as a very important component for his security strategy for Afghanistan. Our posture in Afghanistan aims to preserve the security gains that our efforts have made, and contribute to a robust security relationship in times ahead.

We also will continue to work with Pakistan and the Central Asian states to address existing and emerging threats in the region. Like Afghanistan, Pakistan also faces a potent threat from extremists. We are committed to continuing to improve our relationship with Pakistan by collaborating where our strategic interests converge and engaging diplomatically where they do not. Pakistan is an important partner in our fight against al Qaeda, and plays a role in Afghanistan's security. Sustained U.S. support that recognizes positive developments in these initiatives will help to promote long-term regional stability.

Mindful of our fiscal constraints, the Department needs to maintain a flexible and dynamic presence across the entire USCENTCOM AOR to deter against state or non-state aggression, maintain the fight against violent extremist organizations (VEO), and continue to be the security partner of choice for our partners and allies.

Meeting these challenges will require significant resources and effort. The President's Budget request for FY 2016 supports the Department's efforts to project power globally, deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression in multiple regions, and disrupt and destroy terrorist networks. The Budget also enables the Services to continue addressing their most severe training and maintenance deficiencies while simultaneously reconstituting the force to become smaller and more capable over the next several years.

Secretary Carter is in front of the Senate today to discuss the Department's budgetary requirements, but I'd like to highlight a few items specific to CENTCOM's AOR that will ensure General Austin and his team can succeed in achieving our defense policy objectives:

First is funding to combat diverse terrorist groups, such as ISIL, and provide training, assistance, and equipment to Iraqi security forces and properly vetted members of the moderate Syrian opposition.

Second is reinforcing Afghanistan's security by training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Security Forces as well as by maintaining a limited counterterrorism capability to target the remnants of al Qaeda and preserve the gains of the last decade.

More broadly, the President's budget makes critical investments in innovation to ensure that the U.S. military remains a technologically superior force. It also makes significant investments in our nuclear enterprise and in our ability to stay ahead of emerging threats - including new space

control capabilities; advanced sensors, communications, and munitions for power projection; missile defense; and cyber capabilities. The budget supports investments in promising new technologies and capabilities including assured position, navigation, and timing; high speed strike weapons; aerospace innovation; rail gun technology; and high energy lasers.

Again, these unique capabilities contribute to our strong posture in the USCENTCOM AOR and help underwrite our policies in the region. We will maintain our commitment to the region in the interest of enduring U.S. interests in the region and to combat those threats we collectively face. Maintaining a strong posture in the region remains a priority for the Department of Defense, a priority that is weighed against and balanced with other global requirements and commitments.

I would like to reiterate that this is truly a dynamic time for our policy in the region and the Secretary has signaled his commitment in working with our U.S. government and international partners to shape a more secure region over the coming years. The high tempo of operations, coupled with constrained resources and unpredictable budget levels, has challenged the Department in its efforts to reconstitute full-spectrum readiness. If sequestration returns in FY 2016 and beyond, the Department's readiness would deteriorate markedly, harming our ability to respond promptly and efficiently when called upon. As a consequence, we would have fewer forces available to support operations in such vital regions as the USCENTOM AOR.

Again, I'm clear-eyed about our fiscal constraints, but believe it necessary to maintain a strong, effective force posture in the region - one that continues to build trust, strengthen partnerships, and enhance capabilities. Moving forward, we will continue to maintain forces in the region to counter external aggression, assure regional allies, and defend U.S. and allied security interests.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

**Ms. Christine Wormuth
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy**

Ms. Christine Wormuth was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on June 19, 2014. Ms. Wormuth serves as the Principal Staff Assistant to the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense for all matters on the formulation of national security and defense policy and the integration and oversight of DoD policy and plans to achieve national security objectives.

Ms. Wormuth was appointed as the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Force Development in August, 2012. In this role, Ms. Wormuth was responsible for advising the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and the Secretary of Defense on the development of U.S. national security and defense strategy. She oversaw the strategic guidance development, review, and assessment for military contingency plans and the plans for the day-to-day military activities of Combatant Commanders. In addition, Ms. Wormuth led Policy's efforts to provide strategic guidance and implementation oversight to the Department's planning, programming, and budgeting process as well as various force development, force management, and corporate support processes. As DUSD(SPF), Ms. Wormuth led the Department's 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.

Prior to serving as DUSD(SPF), Ms. Wormuth was a Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Defense Policy and Strategy on the National Security Staff (NSS). As the Senior Director for Defense Policy and Strategy, Ms. Wormuth oversaw the Defense directorate and was responsible for providing NSS expertise on global, functional, and regional defense, military and political-military issues.

Before her assignment to the NSS, Ms. Wormuth was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas' Security Affairs in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. As Principal Deputy, she advised the Assistant Secretary of Defense on the homeland defense activities of the Department and regional security matters for the countries of the Western Hemisphere. In addition, she was responsible for management of the Department's participation in interagency activities concerning homeland security and relations with the Department of Homeland Security.

Before returning to the Department of Defense as a political appointee in early 2009, Ms. Wormuth was a Senior Fellow in the International Security Program with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Ms. Wormuth worked on defense and homeland security issues, including emergency response and preparedness matters, homeland security policy development, defense strategy and resources, and the capabilities and readiness of the U.S. military. In 2007, she served as the Staff Director for the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, also known as "The Jones Commission." As Staff Director, she traveled with the Commission to Iraq, focusing on the readiness of Iraqi police forces.

Prior to joining CSIS, Ms. Wormuth was a Principal at DFI Government Services, a defense consulting firm, where she developed and managed a wide range of projects for government clients within the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security.

Ms. Wormuth began her public service career in the Policy Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 1996 through 2002. She served as the French desk officer during and after the September 11 attacks and, from 2000-2001, was the Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Policy, focusing on defense program and legislative issues. Ms. Wormuth spent more than two years in the Strategy office, where she focused on defense strategy, the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review process and a range of European issues. She entered government as a Presidential Management Intern and received a Masters of Public Policy from the University of Maryland. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science and fine art from Williams College.

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III
COMMANDER
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
THE POSTURE OF U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND
3 MAR 2015

Introduction: We are in the midst of one of the most tumultuous periods in history. There is growing unrest throughout much of the world, while a vast array of malevolent actors seek to capitalize on the increasing instability to promote their own interests. This trend is especially pronounced in the Central Region, where state and non-state actors are in conflict, and the resulting turmoil impacts the affected countries and also directly affects the global economy and the security of the United States. In light of this, the U.S. must continue to exert strong leadership and act vigorously to protect our core national interests in this strategically important region. An effective ‘whole of government’ approach is essential. At U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), our aim is to see a positive transformation of the region over time, achieved by, with, and through our regional partners. Despite the challenges that exist in our area of responsibility (AOR), we do see progress being made in some areas, along with many opportunities. We are confident that our actions in pursuit of these opportunities will continue to produce positive results in the coming days.

Looking ahead, our partners will need to assume a larger share of the burden for providing improved stability in the region. Given the stakes involved, we must keep on assisting them in their efforts. At the same time, we have to find additional methods for dealing with the convergence of compound threats under increasing budget and resource constraints. We must be judicious in our decision-making. Particularly during this volatile period, we cannot afford restrictions or reductions that would degrade our military posture and put our core national interests at greater risk. Simply stated, if we hope to achieve improved security which provides for greater stability and prosperity around the globe, then the Central Region must remain a foremost priority.

A Retrospective Look: This past year has been especially busy for USCENTCOM. In Afghanistan, we completed our transition from combat operations to our train, advise, and assist (TAA) and counter-terrorism (CT) missions. The Afghans are now in the lead for all security operations. They continue to demonstrate significant capability and a strong desire to build upon the progress achieved over the past 13+ years. In recent months, we also saw significant advancements made on the political front as a new unity government was established. President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah have indicated a strong desire to work closely with USG leadership in pursuit of shared objectives. While much work remains to be done in Afghanistan, I am optimistic that developments will continue to trend in the right direction. At the same time, we are focused on the situation in Iraq and Syria. We responded quickly and effectively to the rapid expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the early summer of 2014. We continue to take the necessary measures to counter this barbaric enemy which operates out of ungoverned and under-governed spaces in both countries. We are currently executing our regional campaign plan to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL, and we are doing so with the support of a broad Coalition consisting of 62 other countries and organizations. However, as was clearly stated at the outset, this will take time and we must maintain strategic patience.

We also continue to closely monitor Iran's actions. Our diplomats are working diligently to negotiate an acceptable agreement with respect to Iran's nuclear program, and we hope that they will be successful. But, regardless of the outcome of the P5+1 discussions, our relationship with Iran will remain a challenging one, as we are very concerned by their unhelpful behavior in a number of areas. We also are paying especially close attention to the situation in Yemen.

Recent actions by the Huthis and also al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula coupled with the resignation of Prime Minister Hadi and the subsequent upheaval in the government are cause for significant and growing concern. If the situation continues to erode, and it remains on a negative trajectory now, Yemen could fracture and we could end up losing a key partner in our counter-terrorism (CT) fight and cede additional ungoverned space for our adversaries to operate out of. Meanwhile, we are also watching with interest what occurs in Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, and other parts of the region.

Without a doubt these are challenging times. There is a great deal at stake for the U.S. and our partner nations. At USCENTCOM, we remain confident that we have the right strategy in place to safeguard our interests, to effectively address challenges and pursue opportunities, and ultimately to accomplish our mission on behalf of the Nation. That said, we depend upon the authorities and funding provided by Congress to execute our strategy and to do what is required to defend our core national interests at home and around the globe. Without question, our ability to do so and our overall readiness are put at grave risk by the continued reductions made to the defense budget, and specifically as a result of the Budget Control Act. We are in the midst of a tumultuous and unpredictable period. We are constantly responding to unforeseen contingencies and facing multiple threats from a wide range of actors that include nation states and transnational extremist groups. We cannot afford to constrict our ability to do so effectively by maintaining across-the-board spending cuts that severely limit our flexibility and authority to apply critical defense resources based on demand and the current security environment. If Sequestration goes back into effect in FY 2016, we will be increasingly vulnerable to external threats.

USCENTCOM's Mission. USCENTCOM's mission statement is: "*With national and international partners, USCENTCOM promotes cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters or defeats state and non-state aggression, and supports development and, when necessary, reconstruction in order to establish the conditions for regional security, stability and prosperity.*"

Strategic Environment. The Central Region is an area rich in history, culture, and tradition. It is one of the most strategically important regions, holding well over half of the world's proven oil reserves and plentiful natural gas deposits, which are crucial to the global energy market. The U.S. and our partners have core national interests in this part of the world; interests that include the free flow of resources through key shipping lanes; the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and, the defense of our homeland against the very real and persistent threat of terrorism and extremism. Unfortunately, it also is an area that is plagued by violence and instability, political discord, economic stagnation, resource shortages (e.g., water), ethnic and religious tensions, and wide expanses of ungoverned or under-governed space. Alone or in combination, these provocative factors often make for a volatile environment that puts our interests and those of our partners at risk. Indeed, when things go badly in the Central Region, it has a clear and sizeable impact on the affected countries and other parts of the globe. For this reason it is an area of the world that merits our continued focus.

Of note, more so than in the past, individuals and groups today are coalescing around ethnic and sectarian issues, rather than national identity. This is fracturing institutions (e.g., governments, militaries) along sectarian lines and creating factional rifts within populations. This growing

strain, coupled with other “underlying currents,” fuels much of the tension and conflict that is present today across the USCENTCOM AOR. The principal currents include the growing ethno-sectarian divide; the struggle between moderates and extremists, particularly Islamist-based extremists; rejection of corruption and oppressive governments; and, the “youth bulge,” which reflects the many young, educated, unemployed or under-employed and disenfranchised individuals in the region who are ripe for recruitment by extremist groups. To be effective, our approach in dealing with the challenges that exist in the region must address these complex root causes. In particular, the governments and people of the region must bridge the growing ethno-sectarian divide, elevate the voice of moderates, rid governments of corruption, guard against ungoverned and under-governed spaces, and make sure that young people have better opportunities and are able to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Of course, change will not occur overnight. It will take time to adjust peoples’ mindsets and to counter deeply-engrained prejudices. But, it must be done by the governments and people in the region. Only they can bring about enduring, positive change, with our engagement and support. Indeed, we do have a critical role to play in this important endeavor and we must take action where necessary to counter exigent threats. We are helping our partners to build additional capacity and also foster stronger military-to-military relationships. The goal is to enable them to assume a greater share of the responsibility and do what is required to bring about improved stability in the region.

There are a number of challenges present in the Central Region that require our engagement to mitigate the potential negative effects. These include ongoing operations in Afghanistan, our

activities in Iraq and Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, and our efforts in a host of other locations in USCENTCOM's AOR. Ultimately, our goal in all cases is to move things in the direction of greater stability and to ensure assured access and freedom of movement, recognizing that a secure, stable, and prosperous Central Region is in the best interest of the United States and our partners and allies.

USCENTCOM Priorities. Looking ahead, USCENTCOM will remain ready, engaged and vigilant—effectively integrated with other instruments of power; strengthening relationships with partners; and supporting bilateral and multilateral collective defense relationships to counter adversaries, improve security, support enduring stability, and secure our core interests in the Central Region. In support of this vision, the command remains focused on a wide range of issues, activities, and operations, including our priority efforts:

- Degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL in order to prevent the further spread of sectarian-fueled radical extremism, and to mitigate the continuing Iraq-Syria crisis.
- Continue support to Afghanistan, in partnership with NATO, as a regionally integrated, secure, stable and developing country.
- Defeat Al Qaeda, deny violent extremists safe havens and freedom of movement, and limit the reach of terrorists.
- Counter malign Iranian influence, while reducing and mitigating against the negative impacts of surrogates and proxies.
- Support a whole of government approach to developments in Yemen, preventing Yemen from becoming an ungoverned space for AQ/VEOs; retain CT capacity in the region.
- Maintain credible general and specific deterrent capability and capacity to counter Iran.

- Prevent, and if required, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; disrupt their development and prevent their use.
- Protect lines of communication, ensure free use of the shared spaces (including the cyber commons), and secure unimpeded global access for legal commerce.
- Shape, support, and maintain ready, flexible regional Coalitions and partners, as well as cross-CCMD and interagency U.S. whole-of-government teams, to support crisis response; optimize military resources.
- Develop and execute security cooperation programs, improving bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships, building partnered “capacities,” and improving information sharing, security, and stability.

Critical Focus Areas. While we remain focused on the broad range of challenges present today in the Central Region, there are particular areas that merit a sizeable portion of our attention and resources. These areas are strategically important because of the potential impact on our core national interests and those of our partners. Below are descriptions of the current critical focus areas, along with a listing of some of the key opportunities that we are actively pursuing in an effort to improve stability in USCENTCOM’s AOR.

Protection of Nation States. Historically, nation states have been the dominant players globally. However, in recent years we have witnessed the emergence of transnational extremist groups that desire and, in some cases, demonstrate the ability to operate as major players with unfavorable intentions. In many ways they are attempting to behave like nation states and, in so

doing, they threaten the structures, rules, norms, and values that define the sovereignty of our nation-state based international system.

These transnational violent extremist organizations (VEO) are ideologically opposed to and target the nation states of the Central Region. They conduct attacks and terrorize local populaces in an effort to gain power and influence. This, in turn, weakens the nation states and generates increased instability. This is of obvious concern to us, given that nation states are typically anchors for stability across the globe, with some exceptions (e.g., Iran, Syria). Thus, the U.S. has a vested interest in buttressing our partner nations in the Central Region when necessary as part of a larger ‘whole of government’ effort to build regional stability through effective security assistance and support for inclusive governance.

As directed, we intervene to counter external threats, such as al Qaeda and ISIL. While our primary purpose for doing so is to protect U.S. interests, we also take action to allow time and space for the nation states in the region to build sufficient capacity to protect their own sovereignty. And, we support them through our planned regional engagements, our training and exercise programs, and foreign military sales (FMS) and foreign military financing (FMF) programs; all of which are designed to further enhance our partners nations’ military capacity.

One of the key opportunities that exist amidst the challenges posed by transnational VEOs is to persuade our partners in the region of the urgent need to build their military capacity so that they are better able to defend their own sovereign territory against such threats. Our regional partners are very concerned about the threat posed by ISIL and other VEOs. More importantly, many in

the region recognize that if they do not do something to address the root causes of the growing instability, they can all but guarantee continued political upheaval and anarchy. Again, transformational change can only be achieved by the governments and people of the region. They must decide that the instability caused by the “underlying currents” merits greater action on their part, and they must do more to address the root causes of many of the problems that exist in their region. We can and will support them; but, they must lead the effort.

Iraq-Syria (Operation Inherent Resolve). We remain highly focused on the crisis in Iraq and in Syria. Since launching its major offensive from eastern Syria into Iraq in early June, ISIL, which is commonly referred to by our partners in the region as “DA’ESH,” has largely erased the internationally recognized boundary between Iraq and Syria and has sought to establish a proto state in the deserts of eastern Syria and western Iraq. ISIL’s goal is to spur regional instability in order to establish an Islamic Caliphate. To achieve this end, ISIL has employed three primary lines of effort: 1) instill fear and shape the operational environment using unconventional warfare and traditional terrorist tactics; 2) seize and hold territory; and 3) influence, shape, and define the conflict using sophisticated information operations. Importantly, although significantly degraded in recent months, ISIL still possesses the resources and organizational structure to pose a credible threat to the Government of Iraq (GoI). The erosion of Iraqi and regional stability caused by ISIL places extreme political and economic strain on Jordan, Lebanon, under-governed border areas, and, by extension, the broader Gulf and Levant sub-regions.

That said, ISIL is not a monolith; rather it is a symptom of the larger problems that continue to threaten the Central Region. In particular, the growing divide between ethno-sectarian groups and between religious moderates and radical Islamists, have created ideal conditions for a group like ISIL to take root. Over a period of years the previous government alienated important segments of its society, notably the Sunni and Kurdish populations, which resulted in growing disenfranchisement among these groups. ISIL capitalized on this opportunity and launched a successful blitz into Iraq absent much resistance and with support from local Sunnis who viewed ISIL as a means for bringing about a change in their government. The Sunnis simply refused to fight; and, in so doing, they facilitated ISIL's offensive. The remaining Iraqi security forces were largely incapable of mounting a credible defense against ISIL. After we departed Iraq in 2011, the leadership of the country made a series of poor decisions. Among them was the decision to stop training the security forces, to stop maintaining their equipment, and to assign leaders based on sectarian loyalty rather than competence, merit, and experience. As a result, the security forces' skills atrophied and the condition of their vehicles and weapon systems deteriorated. This precipitated a number of defeats early on in ISIL's push towards Baghdad.

This past September, President Obama announced to the American people that the United States, with the support of a broad Coalition, would take action to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy. We are currently in the early stages of our counter-ISIL campaign, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). Our military campaign plan is comprised of five key elements. They will be achieved in a logical progression; although many of the efforts will occur simultaneously or near-simultaneously. First, we must counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Our intent is to employ a Coalition effort in Iraq to halt the advance of

ISIL and to enable the Iraqis to regain their territory and reestablish control over their border. Once we've halted ISIL's advance in Iraq, which we have done, we said that we would need to contain ISIL, and we are doing so with the assistance of our Coalition partners, including Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. We are working with them to ensure they have the capacity to secure their sovereign borders. We also said that we would need to enable the moderate Syrian opposition forces through our train and equip efforts. Our goal is to develop a reliable partner that can assist in countering ISIL on the ground inside of Syria. Eventually we want to eliminate ungoverned spaces out of which ISIL and other terrorist groups have been operating by enabling the indigenous security forces to defend their own sovereign territories. Once we do all of these things, we will have defeated ISIL through a combination of sustained pressure, a systematic dismantling of ISIL's capabilities, and by effectively expanding our regional partners' CT capacities.

Our military campaign is having the desired effects. Iraqi security forces, to include Iraqi Army and Counter-Terrorism Services (CTS) forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, and tribal elements, with the support of U.S. and Coalition air operations, have halted ISIL's advance in Iraq. The enemy is now in a "defensive crouch," and is unable to conduct major operations and seize additional territory. We can expect that ISIL will continue to conduct ineffective counter-attacks and leverage their information operations to amplify the significance of these attacks. However, they are unable to achieve decisive effects. The effort in Iraq continues to represent our main focus. The actions that we are taking now in Syria against ISIL are shaping the conditions in Iraq. Specifically, our precision air strikes are disrupting ISIL's command and control, attriting its forces and leadership, slowing the flow of reinforcements from Syria into Iraq, and interrupting

the resourcing of their operations. The more than 2,600 total air strikes conducted in Iraq and Syria over the past several months have been extremely effective.

Of course, the United States is not doing this alone. Our efforts are intended to enable the broader, 'whole of government' approach that is currently underway among various departments and agencies in the U.S. government. Equally important are the contributions being made by our Coalition partners. Indeed, the Coalition represents the strength and cohesion of our campaign. In particular, the active and public involvement of five Arab-led nations, specifically Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar, has greatly enhanced the fight and sends a clear message to ISIL and other VEOs that their actions will not be tolerated.

Ultimately, the intent of our regional campaign is not simply to destroy ISIL, although that is a primary objective. Even more importantly, we want to do what we can to help change the conditions inside of Iraq and Syria so that what we see happening there now, does not happen again in the future. The key to doing so is enabling indigenous forces to defend their own borders and provide for the security of their sovereign territory. This is the goal of our advise and assist and build partner capacity efforts currently underway in Iraq, and soon in Syria. We are also working with the Government of Iraq (GoI) to train Sunni tribal elements. Equally important, we are providing, in coordination with the GoI, support for the Kurds who continue to play a significant role in the fight against ISIL.

All that said, the effects of our military efforts will be short-lived if the Iraqis do not effectively address their political problems. The crisis in Iraq will not be solved through military means

alone. The Iraqis have a new government and Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has vowed to be more inclusive of the Sunnis and the Kurds and other minority groups. We are encouraged by the early steps he has taken to reach out to the Sunnis and Kurds and we are urging him to follow through on pledges made in the near-term. This is not a minor issue, as the government cannot succeed long-term without that support. National reconciliation is absolutely critical to the success of the counter-ISIL campaign.

A key opportunity that exists amidst the challenges posed by ISIL is to create conditions that reduce ungoverned spaces and allow for inclusion, security, and good governance in both Iraq and Syria. We pursue this opportunity, in part, by training, advising, and assisting the Iraqi Security Forces, helping them to re-build their capacity, and restructuring them to ensure greater inclusiveness. With your support, we have also have established a program to train, equip and sustain elements of the Syrian moderate opposition. We anticipate that these forces will make important contributions toward degrading and defeating ISIL, and they also will help to guard against ungoverned spaces, protect local populations, and help to create the conditions for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict in Syria that leads to more responsible and responsive governance.

Afghanistan (Operation Freedom's Sentinel). The engagement in Afghanistan remains a top priority. We conducted a successful transition from combat to stability operations, and we continue to help the Afghans to build and mature a capable and sustainable Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Today, the ANSF consists of approximately 326,000 Afghans. They,

not us, are in the lead for all security operations and they are managing to keep the levels of violence comparatively low across the country.

It is also worth noting that the Afghan National Army (ANA) consistently ranks as the country's most respected institution. This popularity largely reflects the improved quality of life that many Afghans are experiencing now as the country becomes increasingly safer and more stable. In recent years, life expectancy rates for Afghans have improved and the infant mortality rate has declined. Opportunities for Afghan women also have expanded; women now represent one-quarter of the labor force and 28% of the National Parliament. And, education and literacy levels have increased. In 2001, 900,000 Afghans were enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Today, there are more than 8.0 million students enrolled in school; and, 39% of them are females. Unemployment or underemployment has also decreased from 50% to 35%. By almost all metrics, progress in Afghanistan has been significant over the past 13+ years. Numerous polls conducted in 2014 indicate that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) enjoys tremendous popular support. Polling reports have shown that more than 80% of Afghans believe their lives are improving. This is positive news; however, there is still much work to be done and the Afghans will need to continue to build upon the progress achieved thus far. They recognize this and clearly demonstrate their intent to do the right things going forward.

The Afghans have the capability to provide for the security of their people and they demonstrate this on a daily basis. However, they do still need some help with sustainment; and, that includes resupply operations, particularly to remote or mountainous areas. They need help with fixed-wing and rotary-wing aviation; and also with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

support. Additionally, due to the delay in government formation, some key leaders who will see the Afghans through the upcoming fighting seasons have only recently assumed their new positions. We will need to work closely with them to enable their success and aid them in building additional needed military capacity. We cannot afford for Afghanistan to once again become a safe haven for extremist groups. Increased instability and diminished security would not only affect Afghanistan, but also the Central Asia region as a whole.

Of course, enduring stability in Afghanistan will not be achieved through military means alone. There must be a credible, reliable, and responsive government in place. Fortunately, after a challenging election, Afghanistan has begun to move forward politically under the National Unity Government led by President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah. Both leaders share similar priorities and beliefs, and they have signaled a strong desire to see the government succeed. They also are actively countering corruption, which represents a principal inhibitor of GIRoA success. Theirs is not an easy undertaking; however, I do believe that they can be effective together.

There is challenging work ahead for the government and people of Afghanistan. However, as I look at the country, I remain cautiously optimistic that developments will continue to trend in the right direction. We have been in Afghanistan for more than 13 years, representing the longest period of continuous conflict fought by our Nation's all-volunteer force. Together with our Afghan and Coalition partners, we have invested many lives and other precious resources with the goal of improving stability in that country, and we want to do all that we can to preserve those hard-earned gains.

Amidst the challenges posed by the current situation in Afghanistan is the opportunity to foster a strong relationship between the United States and Afghanistan and with other partner nations in the Central and South Asia (CASA) sub-region. In particular, this would contribute to improved Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, which would allow for increased counter-terrorism cooperation in the region, along with possibilities for reconciliation. President Ghani, CEO Abdullah, and their new government have indicated their strong desire to work with us and to continue to strengthen our partnership in the coming days. Looking ahead, our intent is to maintain a close relationship with the Afghan government and military as we work together to preserve improved security and stability in the region. At the same time, while the size of our footprint will decrease in the coming years, our continued presence in Afghanistan will allow us to maintain much-needed pressure on al Qaeda and other extremist groups.

Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO). As I travel around the region, I routinely hear from senior military leaders that they do not necessarily fear groups like ISIL's military prowess so much as they fear the groups' ideologies. These groups clearly demonstrate their ability to inspire extremist behavior and to recruit individuals in support of their causes.

In recent years, VEOs have increasingly exploited ungoverned or under-governed spaces in USCENTCOM's AOR. The extremists' use of these areas threatens regional security, as well as U.S. core national interests. They are able to plan and launch attacks, undermine local governments, and exercise malign influence from these spaces. At the same time, VEOs and other militant proxies continue to exploit security vacuums in countries experiencing political

transitions and unrest, namely Iraq and Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Lebanon. Chronic instability, disenfranchised populations, and weak regional governments provide new footholds for a resilient and expanding global jihadist movement and an ideal environment for Iran and its allies to aggressively undermine U.S. regional goals.

Of note, ISIL's rise as a competitor to al Qaeda (AQ) has significantly impacted the jihadist landscape. The two groups are now competing for recruits, resources, and publicity. This will likely result in increased terrorist attacks in the near-term as ISIL, AQ, and other elements attempt to out-do one another.

Meanwhile, the AQ movement is becoming more diffuse and decentralized as compared to pre-9/11. The risk of affiliates and allies operating in more areas and increasingly collaborating and coordinating with one another as a transnational loosely-confederated 'syndicate' is cause for concern. The AQ ideology remains persuasive, attracting and radicalizing susceptible individuals in the region. Thus, it is critical that we maintain our vigilance in countering the group and its narrative.

We must also continue to look for ways to effectively counter ISIL. As noted earlier, ISIL seeks to broaden its reach beyond Iraq and Syria, and will try to leverage regional instability to revive a caliphate stretching from Europe to North Africa to South Asia. ISIL has already received pledges of allegiance from smaller jihadist groups in Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Algeria, and they have inspired lone-wolf attacks in Algeria and the West.

Other extremist groups have leveraged Syria's security vacuum, including the AQ-affiliated Al Nusrah Front (ANF). As the civil war in Syria continues, ANF will threaten neighboring states, particularly Israel and Lebanon, where the group has launched anti-Hezbollah attacks. The ongoing Syrian conflict has also created a safe haven for the Khorasan Group, a network of veteran AQ operatives, providing them with territory to plot and train for attacks against the West and the U.S. homeland.

The Iraq-Syria area of operations is the premier destination for jihadist foreign fighters, with over 15,000 coming from around the globe, and particularly Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America. The majority of these fighters are joining ISIL's ranks, although some have joined ANF and other Syrian opposition groups. As these conflicts carry on, returning battle-hardened foreign fighters will pose increasing risk to their home countries, including the United States. We must sustain our active measures to address this growing threat.

An important opportunity that exists in the Central Region is to limit the overall reach and effectiveness of VEOs, while also reducing the amount of ungoverned or under-governed space in which these groups typically operate. To do so, many of our partners acknowledge the need to counter radical extremists' ideologies, in part by helping to amplify the voice of moderates in the region. They also recognize the need to limit access to ungoverned and under-governed spaces; thereby diminishing the reach and effectiveness of violent extremists operating in the region. By setting the right conditions and helping to promote the efforts of moderate and influential regional leaders, we may achieve significant and lasting improvements. And, these improvements are likely to have pervasive positive effects on the global security environment.

Iran. Iran represents the most significant threat to the Central Region. Our diplomats have been hard at work, trying to reach an agreement with Iran with respect to its nuclear program. The most recent extension allows for continued negotiations through 1 July 2015. While we remain hopeful that the two sides will eventually reach an acceptable deal, it is presently unclear how things will play out. We have to be prepared for what comes next. We will be prepared.

In the meantime, we remain very concerned about Iran's behavior in other areas. Iran continues to pursue policies that threaten U.S. strategic interests and goals throughout the Middle East. In addition to its nuclear program, Iran has a significant cyber capability, as well as the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East. With ranges up to ~2,000 km, Iran is able to strike targets throughout the region with increasing precision using creatively adapted foreign technologies to improve its missile arsenal. It also has increased its anti-access area-denial air defense capabilities. Iran is improving its counter-maritime capabilities (e.g., mines, small boats, cruise missiles, submarines), which serve to threaten the flow of global commerce in the Strait of Hormuz. Perhaps most concerning, Iran routinely engages in malign activity through the Iranian Threat Network (ITN) consisting of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and its surrogates, businesses, and logistics support. Iran also engages in malign activity through support to proxy actors such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas which threatens the sovereignty and security of Israel.

During the past year, the ITN primarily focused on Sunni groups in the Iraq and Syria-based conflict (including the moderate opposition in Syria) by bolstering the Syrian and Iraqi governments and overseeing engagements involving its own militant forces. Iran also maintains

the ability to expand the scope of its activities. This is troubling as Iranian malign influence is enflaming sectarian tensions that are all too often exploited by violent extremist elements in the region. Needless to say, our relationship with Iran remains a challenging one. We will continue to pay close attention to their actions, and we will remain steadfast with our regional partners and do what we can to help improve their capacity to counter Iran and mitigate the effects of their malign activity.

One of the key opportunities that exist with respect to Iran is the prospect of an acceptable agreement regarding Iran's nuclear program. If the P5+1 are able to reach a long-term resolution, that would represent a step in the right direction and may present an unprecedented opportunity for positive change in the Central Region.

A Regional Perspective. In many ways our military-to-military relationships continue to represent the cornerstone of America's partnerships with the nation states in the USCENTCOM AOR. Below are synopses of the status of those relationships, along with the current state of affairs in each of the 20 countries, minus Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and Iran which were addressed in the previous section, "Critical Focus Areas" (see pages 8-21):

The Gulf States – The Gulf States have proven to be valuable Coalition partners, engaging in and supporting offensive operations against ISIL and providing the indispensable access, basing and overflight privileges that are critical to the conduct of operations in the region. In recent months, we have seen some improvement in relations between and among the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar after a period of increased tensions. A

convergence of interests, namely the need to counter the increasing threat posed by ISIL and other violent extremists groups, has afforded a unique opportunity to strengthen the Coalition and also contribute to improving stability and security in the broader Middle East region. In many ways, ISIL's expansion in Iraq has forced the Gulf States to take more seriously the threat posed by ISIL and other violent extremist groups. As a result, they have begun to take a more proactive approach to countering extremist financing and foreign fighter facilitation. They must maintain their focus and continue to make much-needed progress in these areas. At the same time, we are strengthening our partners' military capacity as part of a collective security architecture designed to deter and, where necessary, counter Iranian hegemonic ambitions. Going forward, we will play a key role in making sure that our partners remain united on common interests and security challenges.

In late January of this year, the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** (KSA) saw a smooth transition of power, as King Salman bin Abdulaziz ascended to the throne after the death of his brother, King Abdullah. King Salman comes to power during a very challenging period. The threat from ISIL, particularly along Saudi's northern border, and from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Huthis in the south, has led KSA to take a more proactive role in safeguarding the Kingdom's interests in the region. In particular, KSA's prominent role in the campaign against ISIL, to include its participation in air operations in Syria and in support of the Syria Train & Equip program, has paved the way for other Arab nations to join the Coalition efforts to counter ISIL. Recognizing the need for enhanced maritime security in the Gulf, the Saudis assumed command of the Gulf Maritime Security Task Force for the first time this year. Their leadership is critically important in demonstrating the cohesion of the Combined Maritime Forces generally

and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations in particular. Of note, the Saudis have taken a lead role in reconciling the Gulf States. Looking ahead, our continued support of advanced Saudi defense competencies and further improvements in U.S.-Saudi military interoperability are expected to yield positive impacts, which will in turn contribute to greater stability in the region and beyond.

Kuwait remains a long-time partner and strong and reliable ally in the region, providing critical support for U.S. and Coalition troops, vehicles, and equipment deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. In addition to providing a permissive environment for our deployed forces in the USCENTCOM AOR, Kuwait plays a significant role in the retrograde of equipment from Afghanistan. They also continue to provide critical basing and access for U.S. forces and capabilities needed to address future contingencies. The Kuwaitis are committed to advancing regional cooperative defense efforts as evidenced by their role as a key interlocutor between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain in response to recent tensions, as well as the extensive preparation they have done to host the Eagle Resolve multi-national training exercise in the spring of 2015. The Kuwaitis also have made significant progress towards reconciling the sub-region's long-standing issues with Iraq, leading Gulf Arab diplomatic outreach efforts with the Government of Iraq. The Kuwaitis remain committed to accommodating all segments of their population to preserve internal stability, particularly Sunnis and Shia; and, this has made them typically measured in their support for Gulf Arab regional initiatives. Overall, Kuwait continues to provide critical support to the U.S. and partner nations while managing these internal political challenges.

Our military-to-military relationship with the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) continues along its historically positive trajectory. UAE's growing concerns regarding the spread of extremist ideologies and the threat that they pose to UAE's internal security and regional stability prompted the Emirates to take an active role in the counter-ISIL campaign. They continue to demonstrate their value as a strategic partner by proactively addressing some of the region's toughest problems. Their military capability is arguably the best among the GCC states. UAE's is also the most expeditionary military, deploying forces in support of operations in Afghanistan and Syria. In addition to their participation in the ongoing air operations in Syria, UAE also has offered to send forces and personnel to support the military advise and assist mission and one of the four training sites in Iraq. Of note, the Emirates have a much broader definition of extremism and they want to expand the counter-ISIL military campaign to include a wide range of groups they perceive as extremist, from Islamist political groups to Salafi jihadist groups. Going forward, we will look to further strengthen our security cooperation partnership with UAE through continued engagement and through our FMS program.

Qatar remains one of our most stalwart partners in the Gulf, hosting three of our forward headquarters (USCENTCOM, U.S. Air Forces Central Command, Special Operations Command Central) and facilities and providing us with unimpeded access to the region. The Qataris were among the first to offer a site for the Syria Train & Equip program, along with a place to host the now-established Combined Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (CJIATF) headquarters. Qatar also continues to play an active role in the counter-ISIL campaign. Unlike KSA, Bahrain, and especially UAE, Qatar makes a distinction between Salafi jihadist and political Islamist groups, which creates a challenge in terms of how we approach countering extremist groups in the

region. That said, the Qataris' relationships with a wide range of groups, including more moderate elements, could present potential opportunities.

During the past 12 months, the Qatari Armed Forces have concluded extensive FMS equipment purchases and submitted additional requests. All told, 2014 saw the Qataris allocate billions of dollars to arm their forces with cutting edge American weaponry. This show of renewed and expanding cooperation with the U.S. defense industry clearly reflects the Qataris' drive for greater military interoperability with the United States. Future collaboration with Qatar may see the genesis of a partner force that reflects the United States in organization, arms, and training. We have a long history of cooperation with **Bahrain**, to include hosting the headquarters of the United States Fifth Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces in Manama. Amidst boycotting by opposition members, the Bahraini government held elections in November and December of 2014, which resulted in additional Shia representation. However, there is still significant distrust between the Shia majority and Sunni-led government. The government perceives a direct threat from Shia opposition groups, which it believes are deliberately de-stabilizing the country by attacking the security forces and undermining the economy. The government believes these same Shia opposition groups are influenced and supported by Iran, and that Iran intends to eventually overthrow or supplant it with a Shia government.

Bahrain has been a strong member of the Coalition to counter-ISIL, participating in the initial air strikes into Syria in September of 2014. However, the historically strong relationship between the United States and Bahrain is showing significant strain as the U.S. FMS-hold carries into its third full year. Despite this political challenge, Bahrain continues to pursue the re-supply of

munitions for some of its aviation systems, and it remains firm in its support for U.S. assets at Naval Support Activity Bahrain.

Oman continues to thrive as a moderate and peaceful interlocutor to all equity holders in the Arabian Gulf. Exercising a publically-declared non-interventionist foreign policy, the Sultanate maintains a pragmatic relationship with both Iran and the United States. From our perspective, cooperation between Oman and the U.S. remains close with Oman providing regional access through the use of air and sea ports and also freedom of navigation along the Strait of Hormuz. We value the stability and predictability that Oman provides and will strive to maintain our close relationship with the Sultanate. In the meantime, the Omanis are understandably concerned about the deteriorating situation in Yemen. Of note, the Omanis maintain relationships with Iran and all of Yemen's competing factions, including the Huthis. The Omanis are playing a constructive role in helping to manage the volatile situation in Yemen. We will continue to do what we can to support their efforts and to expand our collaboration to improve Oman's border control, counter-terrorism, and maritime security capacity.

Yemen's long-term outlook is uncertain based on multiple converging drivers of instability. The Huthi takeover of the government and President Hadi's subsequent resignation created a political power vacuum and reenergized historical north/south tensions. Competing factions, including the Huthis, former-President Saleh loyalists, the Islamist Islah Party, and possibly other groups likely see this as an opportunity to assert control over the long-term. Meanwhile, Hadi moved south, rescinded his resignation, and indicated that he intends to govern from Aden. For now, the Huthis have solidified their position as the dominant force in the capital (Sanaa) and northern

governorates, controlling all governance and security mechanisms. UN-sponsored negotiations over forming some type of transition government are ongoing, but Yemen's multiple competing factions will make political resolution very difficult to achieve. It is unclear if the southerners will simply deny Sanaa's authority or unite and declare independence in the near-term, although there are obvious signs of southern opposition to Huthi rule. Southern leaders are likely waiting to see how the situation develops, including the military's response and external actors' willingness to provide them with support. Additionally, Southern military commanders have indicated that they do not intend to take orders from Sanaa.

Yemen's economy has been in a steady state of deterioration for some time. Declining oil revenues and cuts to foreign assistance have contributed to a fiscal crisis. Meanwhile, rampant unemployment further exacerbates Yemen's problems, including making large segments of the population susceptible to radicalization.

The lack of central government leadership coupled with Huthi expansion [and the evacuation of all U.S. personnel in February 2015] have made it exceedingly difficult for us to [conduct partnered or unilateral CT operations against AQAP]. The Yemeni government has generally curtailed its CT operations, and this has allowed AQAP to regain some of its former territory and increase operations against government and security forces. While some of AQAP's combat power may be preoccupied with the Huthi incursion, their external operations cells remain active, especially in the south. We must figure out how to maintain our CT platform in Yemen in order to counter the threat from AQAP. Also concerning is the influence that Iran has with the Huthis, and the particular threat that poses to Saudi Arabia's southern border. Additionally,

Huthi control of Yemen's Hudaydah Port gives them, and potentially Iran, direct influence over maritime traffic through the Red Sea, which presents a significant vulnerability in terms of the protection of core U.S. national and global economic interests.

The Levant – The greater Levant sub-region is struggling to deal with a number of challenges, to include the increasing divide between ethno-sectarian groups, the growing threat posed by ISIL, Al Nusrah Front (ANF) and other violent extremist elements, a growing refugee crisis, and the ongoing civil war in Syria which has now entered into its fourth year. These various crises are straining nation states' economies and worsening the overall security situation. There is also the risk that they will expand further into neighboring areas. We remain highly concerned and continue to do all that we can to assist our partners in the Levant sub-region in their efforts to effectively deal with these and other challenges.

The leadership and people of **Lebanon** continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of continued social, military, and political challenges. This resilience largely reflects the improved performance of the multi-confessional Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which is the most respected institution in the country. That said, Lebanon is challenged by increasing incidents of sectarian violence and terrorist attacks by ISIL and ANF. Thus, our continued support for the LAF's CT operations is critical to ongoing efforts to insulate Lebanon from the conflict in Syria and Iraq. This situation is further exacerbated by a variety of contributing factors, including Lebanese Hezbollah's (LH) involvement in the Syria conflict, the influx of more than one million refugees from Syria, and the presidential vacancy that has remained

unfilled since May 2014. In particular, the absence of a president has put Lebanon's stability at greater risk. It is also breaking down the country's fragile power-sharing consensus.

There is a perception among some Sunnis that the LAF and the Lebanese government favor Shia. Many also believe that the LAF has acquiesced to LH and is unfairly targeting Sunnis. This has led to increasing sectarian violence in traditionally Sunni areas like Aarsal and Tripoli. The growing unrest makes the Sunnis susceptible to extremist messaging by ISIL and other violent extremist elements. The LAF is doing a credible job of managing the current levels of violence inside of the country, in an effort to protect the interests of the Lebanese people. However, this could change if ISIL's narrative begins to resonate with Lebanese Sunnis. ISIL, ANF, and other violent extremist elements are attempting to establish footholds in Lebanon, most notably in the border area adjacent to Syria. Needless to say, the situation in Lebanon remains a very delicate one, and we will remain focused on this important country.

Jordan remains a steadfast partner in the Central Region and the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) are among our strongest military partners. The country's civil and military leadership continue to provide a positive example of professionalism and moderation. That said, Jordan does have a large Palestinian and refugee population vulnerable to extremist messaging and influence. This challenge is further exacerbated by a weakened economy and limited economic opportunity in the country.

The Jordanians fought alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan and are currently flying combat sorties as part of the counter-ISIL Coalition. The Jordanians also continue to provide critical

basing support for OIR missions. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the family of the JAF pilot murdered by ISIL. This horrendous crime will only serve to reinforce Coalition unity and resolve. It prompted a significant increase in public support for the counter-ISIL campaign among the Jordanian populace, which before was generally ambivalent and, to some degree, even opposed to military involvement in the current fight. At the request of the Jordanian government, we recently conducted an assessment of the JAF and found several areas where we could assist in increasing their military capacity and improving their interoperability. We are also working to expedite the delivery of their urgent FMS request to enable their continued active support of the counter-ISIL campaign.

Meanwhile, we are doing all that we can to help Jordan to deal with its significant refugee crisis. The refugee population (>600K) has placed an enormous strain on the economy and on host communities. While the Jordanians are to be commended for the professional and compassionate manner in which they are handling this tough challenge, the reality is that, even with international assistance, the Jordanians are struggling to cope with the impacts. Our goal is to help ease the burden on the nation's economy and infrastructure, while doing what we can to further enhance stability and security in the country.

Egypt remains an anchor state in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. It is important for a number of reasons, to include the country's geographic location, its enduring peace treaty with Israel, its oversight of the Suez Canal, and its cultural and religious influence across the region and the globe.

Egypt continues to deal with the effects of an improving, yet weak economy, damaged by years of political instability and escalated terrorist violence. President al-Sisi and the government are attempting to strike a balance between promoting representative government and countering what they perceive as a subversive form of political Islam and violent extremism that they maintain has found voice through the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptians believe that political Islam is bound tightly to the violent extremist activity they are witnessing in the Sinai and across mainland Egypt, into neighboring Libya. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the 21 Coptic Christians brutally murdered by ISIL last month in Libya.

Our strategic partnership with Egypt remains highly important and our military-to-military relationship represents a key pillar of that partnership. We have been very encouraged to see progress made by the Egyptians with respect to the current holds on FMF and FMS. We continue to work closely with Egypt's Armed Forces (EAF) to improve the security of their borders, including the Sinai, and to stop the flow of fighters and equipment transiting from Libya and Sudan through Egypt into the Central Region. We need to support the EAF's efforts to secure the Sinai so that it does not become an under-governed safe haven for extremist elements. At the same time, we continue to look for ways to integrate Egypt into the counter-ISIL Coalition and our broader regional counter-terrorism campaign.

Central and South Asia (CASA) – The CASA sub-region is adjusting to the shrinking U.S. and international military presence in Afghanistan. The U.S. is now conducting train and advise (TAA) and counter-terrorism missions in Afghanistan, as we normalize our military-to-military relationship. This change has altered the strategic calculus of CASA state and non-state actors as

they look to position themselves to protect their own interests in the event that the Afghan government cannot maintain internal stability. A primary driver of these hedging strategies, uncertainty about the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan post-2014, so far has been countered by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's support for a continued partnership with the U.S. and the international community at large, mainly through his overwhelming support of the NATO Resolute Support TAA mission. Of note, Russia also exerts significant influence in Central Asia through economic, military, and informational means to undermine the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian states. Russia's actions in the Ukraine have placed additional pressure on the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, and this in turn has generated additional challenges for our military-to-military relationships.

At the same time, the CASA sub-region remains an important focus for increased partnerships with the U.S. In particular, concerns regarding border security and the threat from extremist elements have prompted a shared desire for greater cooperation. Going forward, we will look for ways to strengthen our military-to-military partnerships in support of CT, CN, and security assistance efforts.

Violent extremist organizations, to include the remnants of core al-Qaeda (AQ), continue to operate in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and, to a lesser extent, parts of eastern Afghanistan. These groups threaten regional stability, plan attacks against the U.S. and partner interests, and pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Of note, the Taliban insurgency continues to present a credible threat to the Afghan government.

Tension between Pakistan and India also continue to threaten regional stability and largely drives Pakistan's regional strategy, especially as it relates to Afghanistan. Our drawdown from Afghanistan has created an opportunity to normalize our relationships with Pakistan and Afghanistan, and this may, in turn, encourage the two countries to find common ground in countering the VEOs operating in their border region. We are working to identify and facilitate implementation of confidence-and trust-building measures between Pakistan and Afghanistan to further reduce border tensions and increase military cooperation.

Our desired end-state is a stable sub-region characterized by a low risk of conventional or nuclear war, with regional states committed to non-interference with respect to their neighbors' internal affairs, the denial of sanctuary for VEOs, and the non-proliferation of WMD. We will maintain a unilateral capacity to conduct CT operations against high-value targets and groups in the region that pose a threat to the U.S. or our core national interests. To prevent future conflicts, we will also work to improve military-to-military relationships by facilitating more frequent contact between and among the region's military leadership. This includes moving from bilateral to multi-lateral exercises and encouraging multilateral training and operations.

We have made substantial progress in our efforts to strengthen cooperation with **Pakistan** over the past year. We are encouraged by the leaderships' commitment to counter-insurgency operations in the FATA and openness to improve relations with Afghanistan. However, Pakistan continues to face a number of political, economic, and security challenges that threaten to undermine the long-term stability of the state. Violent extremists operating in the country exploit these conditions for their own purposes. This is hindering the security forces' ability to

protect the population from terrorist attacks and prevent extremists from exporting violence across the region.

The U.S.-Pakistan military-to-military relationship continues to improve. Key contributing factors are our FMF, international military education and training, and the Coalition Support Fund. In December 2014, we addressed respective expectations for the scope and scale of our future military-to-military engagements. We also prioritized our security cooperation at the Defense Consultative Group Conference with the goal to help Pakistan to build additional capacity in support of their counter-insurgency and CT operations and other common objectives.

The Pakistani military's recent operations to clear militant strongholds in North Waziristan and other FATA regions and to prevent the militants' return have achieved near-term successes. However, Pakistan will likely continue to face the threat of VEOs for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, more positive rhetoric on Afghan-Pakistan relations from Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, combined with Afghan President Ghani's expressed desire for better relations, may foretell an effort by both sides to develop a more common view of the threat of VEOs operating in the border region. Of note, in response to the tragedy at the Army Public School and College in Peshawar in December of 2014, the leaders of both countries have demonstrated a desire to improve their cooperation going forward. This is encouraging and represents progress; and, USCENTCOM will continue to do our part to help strengthen and ultimately solidify this important relationship.

The U.S. military relationship with **Uzbekistan** has strengthened considerably over the past year with implementation of the first year of the five-year Plan for Military and Military Technical Cooperation. Mutual interests related to improving border security, CT, counter-narcotics, and countering the return of Uzbek fighters from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, underpin our relationship. The provision of Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles through the Excess Defense Articles program improved protection provided to Uzbek security forces. And, expanded U.S. Special Forces training will further improve the Uzbek military's capacity to meet security challenges. Uzbekistan remains committed to ensuring regional stability via continued support for our operations in Afghanistan by providing access to the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). It also provides electricity to northern Afghanistan. As with other countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan continues to prefer bilateral vice multi-lateral military relationships.

Our relationship with **Tajikistan** is advancing steadily in spite of significant Ministry of Defense leadership changes and growing security concerns. We continue to assist the Tajiks in developing the capacity to meet a variety of CT, CN, and border security challenges, while also supporting their development of a peacekeeping capability. Tajikistan provides critical support to ongoing Afghanistan operations by allowing transit along the NDN. That said, the Tajiks are concerned about the near- and long-term effects of the Afghanistan transition on regional security and stability.

The **Kyrgyz Republic** faces many of the same or similar security challenges as its neighbors, particularly with respect to the threat posed by violent extremist elements operating in the region. Bilateral and multi-lateral engagements in the areas of CT, CN, and border security continue on a

case-by-case basis. Our military-to-military relationship with the **Kyrgyz** has been positive. We are assisting them with their development of an explosive ordnance disposal capability. We look forward to full resumption of security cooperation activities, pending the successful outcome of ongoing negotiations for a replacement of the Defense Cooperation Agreement that expired in July of 2014.

Our relationship with **Kazakhstan** is one of the most well developed in the Central Asia sub-region. The Ministry of Defense continues its transformation from a traditional Soviet-style territorial defense role into a more modern, adaptable force capable of meeting multiple, diverse security threats. Furthermore, the Kazaks have proactively sought our assistance in improving their training, personnel management, and logistics capabilities. Kazakhstan remains the largest contributor among the Central Asian states to Afghan stability, providing technical and financial support to the ANSF and educational opportunities in Kazakhstan for young Afghans. We continue to leverage Steppe Eagle, the annual multinational peacekeeping exercise co-sponsored by the U.S. and Kazakhstan, to improve peacekeeping capabilities and to foster regional integration.

Turkmenistan's humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and efforts to increase regional economic integration are important to enhancing stability in the Central Asia sub-region. However, Turkmenistan's declared policy of positive neutrality limits our opportunities for substantive military-to-military collaboration. Engagements in the areas of Caspian Sea security, disaster preparedness, medical services readiness, and professional military education continue; however, they are limited. The Turkmen recently expressed a desire to acquire U.S. military

equipment and technology to address threats to their security along their southern border with Afghanistan. We will do what we can to support those requests.

Our Strategic Approach. Our ability to effectively employ our “Manage-Prevent-Shape” strategic approach is largely dependent upon the capacity and readiness of our forward-deployed military forces and Service prepositioned materiel capabilities, working in concert with other elements of U.S. power and influence. Equally important are our efforts aimed at building our regional partners’ capacity and strengthening our bilateral and multilateral relationships. This is achieved principally through key leader engagements and our training and joint exercise programs.

Building Partner Capacity (BPC). To improve stability in the USCENTCOM AOR and to lessen the need for costly U.S. military intervention, we must be forward-leaning and empower our partners to meet internal security challenges and work collectively to counter common threats. When compared to periods of sustained conflict, BPC is a low-cost and high-return investment. This is especially important in today’s resource-constrained environment. Joint training exercises, key leader engagements, and FMS and FMF programs continue to represent the key pillars of our BPC strategy. Also critical are relevant authorities and programs noted in the FY16 President’s Budget (PB), namely the Global Train and Equip authority, Counter Terrorism Partnerships Fund, and Section 1208 programs. Tangible by-products of our BPC efforts include increased access and influence, enhanced interoperability, and improved security for our forward deployed forces, diplomatic sites, and other U.S. interests. Working “by, with, and through” our regional partners also serves to enhance the legitimacy and durability of our

actions and presence in the region. In the event some type of U.S. involvement is required, having strong partners allows for increased burden sharing and improves the likelihood of success.

Joint Exercise and Training Program. The USCENTCOM Joint Exercise and Training Program continues to grow in complexity and relevance with extended participation throughout the USCENTCOM AOR during FY2014 and into the 1st Quarter of FY2015. All five Component Commands developed or continued to execute a robust exercise program across the complete broad spectrum of USCENTCOM Theater Security Cooperation Objectives.

Over the past year, USCENTCOM conducted 45 bilateral and multi-lateral exercises. Key among them was the Eager Lion 14 exercise, which was hosted by Jordan and included naval, air, and land components from 14 different countries operating at 14 locations and totaling over 4,000 personnel from our partner nations and some 4,500 U.S. military and civilian support members. The International Mine Countermeasures Exercise 15, executed in late 2014, took place over 8,000 square miles of navigable waterway and united some 43 nations, including over 7,000 global military service members and over 40 naval vessels and numerous other warfighting assets in defense of the region's maritime commons. All of the exercises had tangible and measurable impacts in terms of advancing our national security objectives, demonstrating mutual commitment to regional security, promoting combined command, control, and communications, and enhancing interoperability. The ability of the counter-ISIL Coalition to conduct very effective, unrehearsed short-notice strike operations in Iraq and Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve is clear evidence of the impact of this vibrant exercise program.

Required Capabilities. In order to effectively protect and promote U.S. and partner nation interests in the region, USCENTCOM must maintain a strong presence and be adequately resourced and supported with the necessary posture – forces, equipment, and enablers. Our required capabilities include:

Forces and Equipment. Forward-deployed rotational joint forces that include fighter and airlift assets, surveillance platforms, ballistic missile defense assets, naval vessels, ground forces, and cyber teams that are trained, equipped, mission-capable and ready to respond quickly are indispensable to protecting our core interests and supporting and reassuring our partners in the region. A capable force presence forward deployed and enabled by a flexible and distributed footprint with assured access is also required. This ready and capable joint presence can prevent conflict through deterrence, manage crisis escalation through early intervention, and allows for a broader set of response options for consideration by national authorities, in addition to rapid response to crises to quickly achieve stated objectives. We will continue to work with the Department of Defense to determine a sustainable, flexible long-term posture that provides us with the presence, access and partnerships we need for enduring missions and activities in the USCENTCOM AOR.

USCENTCOM requires continued regeneration, reset, and modernization of designated Service prepositioned equipment capability sets. The Services preposition equipment and materiel capabilities as capability sets in support of deploying forces, to provide national leadership the necessary capability and flexibility to respond to a diverse set of crisis scenarios, to include preventing disruptions to trade and security that could have disastrous impacts on the global

economy, and the ability to rapidly provide disaster relief support. The Services aggressively reconstitute and regenerate sustainment stocks depleted over the course of a decade-plus of major combat operations; however, equipment shortfalls continue to impact indirect fire, sustainment, and troop support capabilities. Shortcomings are largely the result of budget cuts that were directed by the Budget Control Act. Service prepositioned sets previously issued by each of the Services over the course of contingency operations require appropriate reset and reconstitution in order to posture the command for future contingency operations.

Information Operations (IO). Information Operations (IO) remains a top priority. Our investments in IO thus far have made it USCENTCOM's most cost-effective method and the top non-lethal tool for disrupting extremist activities across the Central Region. We have an enduring responsibility to counter this asymmetric threat and recognize IO will endure beyond major combat and counter-insurgency operations. As ISIL has clearly demonstrated in Iraq and Syria, VEOs continue to expand and increase their speed and effectiveness in the information environment which directly impacts USCENTCOM's mission effectiveness. Our military information support operations (MISO) programs serve as the model for the Department and require baseline funding to allow for sustainment and Department-wide expansion. Our IO efforts are synchronized and carefully nested in support of a broader 'whole of government' approach to countering the extremist threat.

Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD). Integrated Air and Missile Defense is increasingly important to us and our regional partners as threat technology improves and systems become more flexible, mobile, survivable, reliable and accurate. Today, the global demand for

ballistic missile defense capabilities far exceeds supply. In particular, there is a need for additional upper- and lower-tier interceptors and surveillance and warning systems. The ability to conduct early detection, identification, and engagement of possible threats is essential. Thus, active measures will need to be taken to address this capability shortage. Providing IAMD protection to deployed U.S. forces and our critical infrastructure is crucial to mission success and provides a visible deterrence to regional aggression. Moreover, it signals U.S. commitment to regional partners and provides flexibility to respond to regional contingencies. Our bases in the USCENTCOM AOR will increasingly be at risk to the ballistic missile threat if we continue along the current trajectory.

Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) Assets. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support continues to be challenged by supply-versus-demand limitations. Due to our counter-ISIL operations, demand for ISR increased substantially, along with the need to maintain a persistent eye on strategic risks and possible threats to U.S. national security interests. Collection in anti-access/area denial environments continues to present a tough challenge. As evidenced by recent events in Iraq and Syria, USCENTCOM's need for ISR and collection platforms does not end once named operations cease. On the contrary, our demand for multi-discipline, low-observable ISR with strike capability that can operate in adverse weather conditions and non-permissive environments is increasing. If we do not meet the requirements, we can expect that our information dominance, situational awareness, and security posture will diminish accordingly. As we reduce our footprint in Afghanistan, it is imperative that our intelligence collection capabilities be constant and robust to support our forces on the ground. Likewise, with respect to Iraq and Syria, there is also a need for a robust ISR capability to

develop and maintain situational awareness of the security environment, particularly in denied and ungoverned spaces and in the absence of a large U.S. ground presence. And, while we are looking to our coalition partners to help fill some of the ISR demand, shortages do remain that will need to be addressed.

Ascertaining malign actor intentions and capabilities remains a challenge. Full-motion video (FMV) has become fundamental to almost all battlefield maneuvers, adversary detection, terrorist pattern of life development, force protection operations, and a myriad of other applications. We use FMV to buy down operational risk and to improve visibility of the security environments where our forces are required to operate. Full-motion video remains critical to our success; although, we certainly recognize that we cannot rely on FMV for every situation. Human intelligence, satellite, other airborne assets, and other special collection capabilities also remain integral to solving many of our problem sets.

Cyber Security. USCENTCOM must be effectively postured and have sufficient capability to counter the growing cyber threat that the United States and our regional partners now face. Maintaining an effective cyber defense requires the collective efforts of partners who share a common vision and are mutually committed.

Looking ahead, we will need to aggressively improve our cyber posture to mitigate advanced persistent threats to our network and critical information. As the cyber community matures, we will plan, integrate, synchronize, and conduct cyber operations in cooperation with other USG agencies and partner nations. USCENTCOM's cyber activities necessitate the active pursuit of

key requirements, resourcing, training, as well as the build out of our cyber forces and the acquisition of needed cyber capabilities. This requires a multi-disciplined approach to address a diverse and changing threat, adequate resourcing, and a command and control model aligned to the operational chain of command in order to readily receive and synchronize orders and execute cyber operations.

At the same time, we continue to support our regional partners in building their capacity and expertise in the cyber domain. This partner capacity is essential in the cyber domain, as the global economy relies in part on key resources that reside across the Central Region. With Congress' backing, we will continue to focus on cyber defense and cyber security cooperation as key components of our theater strategy.

Required Authorities and Resources. The realities of the current fiscal environment continue to impact USCENTCOM headquarters (HQs), our five component commands, established combined/joint task forces, and 18 country teams. Persistent fiscal uncertainty hinders efficient and timely implementation of operational, logistical, tactical, and strategic milestones and objectives. We request your help in addressing the budget uncertainty caused by the Budget Control Act and our dependence on continuing resolutions at the start of the fiscal year.

Provided the right authorities and resources, our world-class DoD Civ-Mil team can and will successfully accomplish any mission. With that in mind, we sincerely appreciate Congress' continued support for key authorities and appropriations needed to sustain current and future

operations in the Central Region and to respond to emerging crises. Collectively, the below required authorities and resources enable our efforts to shape positive outcomes for the future.

Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)-funded Accounts. USCENTCOM's programs, operations, and activities are resourced almost exclusively by OCO appropriations vice Baseline funding. This funding strategy potentially impacts our forward-deployed forces and our regional partners. We remain concerned that this approach limits predictability, does not allow for advanced planning, and conveys an unintentional temporary nature to our strategy in the region. All involved stakeholders must work together to develop an enduring approach to resourcing the defense strategy in the USCENTCOM AOR.

Iraq and Syria Train & Equip Resources. Continued support for flexible authorities is needed to effectively react to the urgent threat posed by ISIL in Iraq and in Syria. Improving the capacity and effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces, to include Kurdish and Sunni tribal forces, and moderate opposition forces in Syria is key to countering ISIL and other extremists operating in those countries. The Congressional authorities and resourcing provided to initiate the training and equipping of Syrian moderate opposition forces to counter a degraded ISIL and to defend territorial gains will undoubtedly contribute to the ultimate defeat of ISIL and the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the Assad Regime. The turnaround of the dire situation in Kobane, Syria is indicative of how, with a fairly limited, precise application of authorities (allowing U.S. aircraft to airdrop donated Kurdish weapons and equipment) and U.S. air support, and a determined and willing partner, ISIL's momentum and narrative were effectively countered.

The Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) and authority demonstrate the United States' commitment, in partnership with the international community and the Government of Iraq, to build a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable Iraq security force. We strongly endorse and support extending the ITEF and establishing the stand-alone Syria Opposition Train and Equip Fund and authority in FY16 to ensure that the ISF and Syrian moderate opposition forces are professional and sufficiently equipped to accomplish their mission, which consists of disrupting, defeating, and ultimately destroying ISIL within their sovereign territories.

The **Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)** remains pivotal to ensuring the continued security and stability of the GIRoA and the ANSF. Historically, ASFF has provided 80-90% of the ANSF operating budget. While future ASFF requests are expected to decrease, they will still remain ANSF's primary funding source for at least the next few years. The ANSF is posturing for long-term supportability through a program of "Improve, Ready, Sustain." They are committed to instilling fiscal discipline as they refine requirements generation and define capabilities in a resource-constrained environment. The U.S. Government and the GIRoA must continue to work hand-in-hand through this period of transition. With continued U.S. support, the ANSF is in a position to maintain stability within Afghanistan, while reducing the influence of malign regional actors.

Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Our need for continued Congressional funding of FMF programs that support USCENTCOM security cooperation objectives cannot be overstated. The Central Region accounts for more than half of all global FMS. Our partners in the region want U.S. equipment because they recognize that it is

the best in the world. It also represents a very effective means for establishing long-term relationships between the U.S. and our partner nations and ensures greater interoperability between our militaries. We appreciate Congressional support for interagency initiatives to streamline the FMS and FMF process to ensure that we remain the partner of choice for our allies in the region and are able to capitalize on emerging opportunities going forward.

Excess Defense Articles (EDA)/ Foreign Excess Personal Property (FEPP). The EDA program has allowed the Department of Defense to transfer materiel determined to be excess to Service requirements. Over the years, EDA has been an integral component in building partner capacity and has proven beneficial in our engagements with our regional partners. We have reaped the benefits of this authority several times in the last year, enabling us to support requirements in Iraq, Uzbekistan, and other countries located within the USCENTCOM AOR or participating in operations with U.S. forces. Several other EDA transfers to the UAE, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Egypt are pending. Of note, USCENTCOM sourced as much EDA directly from Afghanistan as was available without increasing risk to the Services and the State Department at the time of the respective transfers.

In the same light, the FEPP authorization has allowed us to transfer non-military type equipment (e.g., wall lockers, generators, non-tactical vehicles) acquired as part of our base closures and reductions to Iraqi and Afghan security forces, as well as to other Afghan Government Ministries, Kuwait, and Kyrgyzstan. This authority was beneficial in allowing turn-key transfer of select bases while also reducing costs by allowing us to transfer items needed by the host

nation, rather than retrograding those same items to CONUS at a cost higher than their actual value.

Coalition Support. Continued Congressional support for Coalition Support authorities and funding, to include the Coalition Support Fund (CSF), the associated Coalition Readiness Support Program (CSR), and the Lift and Sustain appropriation is key to maintaining effective coalitions and facilitating the participation in combined military operations of coalition partners who would not otherwise be able to participate due to lack of resources. Without coalition partners' participation, U.S. forces would be required to shoulder more of the burden of conducting these operations; and, in some cases, the operations simply could not be accomplished. This would pose additional risks to the safety and security of U.S. forces in theater and adversely impact critical U.S. missions, including the Afghanistan Transition and the campaign to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Financial and logistical support to coalition partner nations helps to ensure interoperability in the execution of current and pending missions; enhances planning and force protection; and, also simplifies logistical support mechanisms; while also improving our collective ability to respond quickly to contingency requirements.

Our requirement to provide logistical support to our coalition partners has not decreased despite the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan. The extension of authorities outlined in Section 1223 of the FY15 NDAA to provide logistical support to our coalition forces participating in military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq will be required to execute the Resolute Support Mission and are increasingly relevant as the counter-ISIL Coalition continues to expand. Our coalition partners have different sets of equipment and differing abilities to wage expeditionary warfare.

As the region changes focus, we must ensure that we maintain the logistics authorities currently in place in order to respond quickly to future contingencies.

Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). As the United States' role in Afghanistan continues to evolve, commanders must retain the flexibility that the CERP provides in order to accomplish their mission under Resolute Support. Urgent humanitarian needs cannot be predicted and will remain a factor as long as we have security forces on the ground in country.

Military Construction (MILCON). We continue to leverage existing infrastructure and host nation funding where possible, as well as maritime posture and reach back capabilities to meet steady state and surge requirements. However, in some cases, MILCON is still required to expand infrastructure capabilities to facilitate sustainment support for U.S. forces and operations. Current projects are essential to our contingency and steady state operations and support the defense pillars outlined in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.

Long-term C4 Sustainment Plan. USCENTCOM, our Service Components, Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF), and our deployed forces currently rely heavily on command, control, communications, and computer (C4) systems to support operations across the region. These capabilities, primarily resourced through OCO funding, sustain C4 requirements at the HQ and eight of 24 strategic operational locations in the AOR. A diverse and survivable C4 infrastructure, via both SATCOM and terrestrial means, is essential to the successful conduct of missions in the USCENTCOM AOR.

The U.S. Central Command Team. At USCENTCOM, we continue to do our part to keep our Nation and our interests around the globe safe and secure. We have an exceptional and enormously capable team and, without question, our greatest assets are our people. We owe it to them to make sure they have everything they need to do their jobs in support of the mission as well and as safely as possible. This includes making sure that they have the best equipment, care and support, and, most importantly, we must guarantee them safe, secure, and respectful environments to live and work in. We should also do what we can to support them when they return from deployments or have completed their service obligations. Likewise, we must ensure that their families are properly cared for and supported.

Conclusion. All of us have a vested interest in achieving a stable and secure Central Region, and success will require everyone working together towards this common goal. This is not just the military's responsibility, or the U.S. Government's responsibility, or even America's responsibility alone. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stated, "Peace cannot be achieved by one man or one nation. It results from the efforts of men of broad vision and goodwill throughout the world."

That said, the United States, and in particular our military, does have a share in the task at hand. We are uniquely qualified in our ability to lead and also leverage our partners' capabilities, while enabling them to play a larger and more active role in combatting common enemies, addressing challenges, and also actively pursuing the many opportunities that exist in that strategically important part of the world. Only the governments and people of the region can achieve enduring transformational change. But, by supporting them and helping to expand their capacity,

and by providing them with the decision space required to improve conditions and also provide for the security of their sovereign territories, we will help to successfully move the Central Region in the direction of greater stability and security. This remains our ultimate goal.

The year ahead is certain to be an important one throughout the Middle East and parts of Central and South Asia. The consequences of our actions, or lack thereof, will undoubtedly prove significant. Our intent at USCENTCOM is to build upon the progress achieved to date. We will continue to manage existing conflicts and crises, while doing what we can to prevent confrontations and developing situations from worsening and becoming crises. We also will continue to pursue the many opportunities present in the region, recognizing that it is through them that we will shape positive outcomes and achieve improved stability and security throughout our area of responsibility. Finally, we will continue to support the efforts of our U.S. Government colleagues; understanding that the effects of our individual contributions are greatly amplified when we work together in a constructive and collaborative fashion.

Today, more than 78,000 of the very best Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen and Civilians assigned to or associated with U.S. Central Command are selflessly serving in difficult and dangerous places around the globe. They continue to do an exceptional job in support of the mission and this great country of ours. Without question, we could not do what we do without them. We are enormously proud of them and their families. They are and will remain our foremost priority.

USCENTCOM: Ready, Engaged, Vigilant!

General Lloyd J. Austin III
Commander, U.S. Central Command

General Lloyd J. Austin III, hails from Thomasville, Georgia. He was commissioned an Infantry second lieutenant in 1975 upon graduation from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. General Austin has served in a wide variety of command and staff positions throughout his 39-year career. His early assignments included duty with: the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army; 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; U.S. Army Recruiting Battalion, Indianapolis, Indiana; United States Military Academy, West Point, New York; 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry and 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division (Light), Fort Drum, New York.

General Austin returned to Fort Bragg in 1993 and served as Commander, 2d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division; G-3 82d Airborne Division; and later as the Commander, 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division from 1997 to 1999. Following duty at Fort Bragg, he was assigned to the Pentagon where he served as Chief, Joint Operations Division, J-3 on the Joint Staff.

General Austin served as the Assistant Division Commander (Maneuver), 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Stewart, Georgia and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM from July 2001 until June 2003; and as Commanding General, 10th Mountain Division (Light), Fort Drum, New York from September 2003 until August 2005 with duty as Commander, Combined Joint Task Force-180, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan. He then served as the Chief of Staff, United States Central Command from September 2005 until November 2006 followed by assignment as the Commanding General, XVIII Airborne Corps in December 2006 where he commanded Multi-National Corps – Iraq, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM from February 2008 until April 2009. He was then assigned to the Pentagon as the Director, Joint Staff from August 2009 to August 2010. General Austin commanded United States Forces – Iraq from September 2010 through the completion of OPERATION NEW DAWN in December 2011. Most recently General Austin served as the 33d Vice Chief of Staff of the Army from January 2012 to March 2013. General Austin assumed command of United States Central Command on 22 March 2013.

His military education includes the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, United States Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia; United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the United States Military Academy, a Master's Degree in Education from Auburn University and a Master's Degree in Business Management from Webster University.

General Austin's awards and decorations include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal (with Three Oak Leaf Clusters), the Distinguished Service Medal (with Two Oak Leaf Clusters), the Silver Star, the Defense Superior Service Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), the Legion of Merit (with Oak Leaf Cluster), the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (with Four Oak Leaf Clusters), the Joint Service Commendation Medal, the Army Commendation Medal (with Six Oak Leaf Clusters), the Army Achievement Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), the Combat Action Badge, Expert Infantryman Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, the Ranger Tab and the Joint Chiefs of Staff Identification Badge.

**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

MARCH 3, 2015

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MRS. HARTZLER

Secretary WORMUTH. First, we very much share your concern about the status of Christians and other minorities in Iraq. We strongly condemn ISIL's recent attacks on the ancient city of Nimrud, in Iraq, and on Christian villages in northeastern Syria—as well as their continued use of barbaric tactics to massacre and enslave innocent people, and persecute minority populations. This is among the very reasons we are working to defeat ISIL in Iraq. Unfortunately, DOD does not track the specific number of Christian tombs, shrines, statues, and other religious sites that have been destroyed by ISIL, so we do not have more detailed information to share. The State Department and USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] may be able to give you a more comprehensive briefing, based on their relationships with NGOs.

What we do know is, as you suggested, there are an estimated 300,000–350,000 Christians remaining in Iraq. Prior to 2003, Iraq's Christian population was approximately 1.4 million, historically concentrated in northeastern Ninewa province, with small populations in several urban centers such as Mosul, Baghdad, Erbil, and Kirkuk city. Approximately one million Christians left Iraq due to security concerns, discrimination, and limited economic opportunities in the years following 2003.

Today, Christians and other religious minorities are disproportionately represented among displacement camps in northern Iraq due to ISIL's incursion and threats upon their historic communities. Most Christians still in Iraq are located in relatively secure Kurdish-controlled areas. Nonetheless, Christian communities in Iraq remain concerned about their future in the country due to ongoing sectarian violence and a lack of economic opportunity. [See page 31.]

General AUSTIN. We do not track or have the information to share with you concerning the number of Christian tombs, shrines, statues, and other religious sites that have been destroyed by ISIL. What we do know is that there are an estimated 300,000–350,000 Christians remaining in Iraq. Prior to 2003, Iraq's Christian population was approximately 1.4 million (of an estimated total population of 26 million). Historically, Christians were concentrated in northeastern Ninewa province, with small populations in several urban centers such as Mosul, Baghdad, Erbil, and Kirkuk city. In the years following 2003, approximately one million Christians emigrated from Iraq due to security concerns, discrimination, and limited economic opportunities. Today, most Christians remaining in Iraq are located in relatively secure Kurdish-controlled areas of the north. Unfortunately, Christian communities in Iraq may still be susceptible to sectarian violence and are concerned about a lack of economic opportunity. [See page 31.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

MARCH 3, 2015

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SHUSTER

Mr. SHUSTER. President Obama's proposal for a new Authorization for the Use of Military Force "does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces in enduring offensive ground combat operations." Please specifically define "enduring ground operations." Do you believe the reference to "enduring ground operations" will be clear to our commanders on the ground? Since the administration has not yet adequately defined "enduring ground operations," which will be responsible for determining whether an action violated the stipulation against "enduring ground operations"?

Secretary WORMUTH. The AUMF would not authorize long-term, large-scale ground combat operations like those the United States conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan. It would provide the flexibility to conduct ground combat operations in more limited circumstances, such as rescue operations involving U.S. or coalition personnel or special operations to take military action against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant leadership.

I do believe that the reference to enduring ground combat operations would be clear to our commanders on the ground, and certainly to the President and Secretary of Defense initiating any such action. Any requirement for U.S. ground combat operations would be assessed on a mission-by-mission basis. In light of existing guidance limiting the role of U.S. ground forces as described in the reports submitted by the President consistent with the War Powers Resolution, we do not believe there would be opportunities for the commanders on the ground to engage in "enduring ground operations" without further orders from Washington.

Mr. SHUSTER. A number of friendly nations continue to acquire and maintain American weapons technology, including systems like the PAC GEM-T missile, as an effective and efficient countermeasure to regional threats. How can we better leverage our industrial base in this manner to support our Middle Eastern allies in their fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant?

Secretary WORMUTH. The Department of Defense (DOD) is working closely with the U.S. defense industry and partners in the Middle East region to help them build capabilities that facilitate their own security and that of the region. In support of this effort, DOD maintains close relationships with the defense industry to leverage new and existing technologies that meet the unique requirements of partners around the world. It is through the increased collaboration and dialogue with both industry and partner nations that the Department provides cost-effective solutions for greater capability as well as partner interoperability with U.S. forces and each other.

The Department continues to work bilaterally with partners in the Middle East to support the development of air and missile defense capabilities while also establishing the foundation for increased regional collaboration in support of U.S. national security interests. The DOD-defense industry partnership has played a vital role in developing both bilateral solutions and opportunities for system integration in support of these efforts.

Although missile defense remains a priority in the Middle East region, effective counter Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (C-ISIL) operations demand a different set of capabilities. DOD continues to work closely with interagency partners and industry to expedite delivery of defense articles and services in response to urgent requirements of partners engaged in C-ISIL operations.

Mr. SHUSTER. The President has placed a 3-year limitation in his proposed Authorization for the Use of Military Force. Do you believe that the current strategy will defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in that time window? We have seen a steady decline in government stability that expands beyond the Middle East, into Africa and elsewhere. Has President Obama, as Commander in Chief, too narrowly defined and too marginally addressed extremist threats? Do you presently believe there are any other emerging terrorist threats or organizations that have the potential to fill the power vacuum that would be created by ISIL's defeat?

General AUSTIN. I believe the strategy that calls for the use of indigenous forces supported by a broad coalition to defeat ISIL is the right strategy and it will suc-

ceed. We are only in month eight of a 36-month campaign, and the coalition already has made significant progress in the fight against ISIL. Specifically, the combined air-ground campaign continues to deny the enemy freedom of movement, while disrupting their ability to resupply and seize and hold new terrain. Overall, I assess that we are about where we said that we would be at this point in the campaign. That said, if more time is required, I am confident our national leadership will provide the necessary authorities to support our continued efforts to defeat ISIL. In the meantime, I do believe we should work by, with and through our coalition partners to achieve our shared goals and objectives. In the end, we want to defeat ISIL, and also take the necessary steps to ensure that what we see happening now in Iraq and Syria does not happen again in the future.

The threat posed by a number of violent extremist organizations will likely persist after ISIL has been defeated. Certainly al-Qaida and/or its affiliates, such as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qaida in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), present an enduring threat to stability and security in the Central region. These groups have global ambitions and they aspire to topple “apostate regimes” and conduct attacks against the West and western interests. And so, we must continue to maintain pressure on these groups going forward, while also helping our regional partners to effectively address the ‘underlying currents’ or the root causes of the instability that are at play in that volatile and strategically-important part of the world.

